

## ABSTRACT

Christopher C. Bingham. FROM NEW BERN TO BENNETT PLACE WITH "COOKE'S FOOT CAVALRY: A HISTORY OF THE TWENTY-SEVENTH REGIMENT OF NORTH CAROLINA TROOPS, 1861-1865. (Under the direction of Dr. David E. Long) Department of History, September 2007.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the history of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina regiment and the actions of its officers and men during the American Civil War. This regiment was often in the forefront of Confederate military operations in the eastern theater of the conflict, especially those involving General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. In addition, the experiences, motivations, wishes, and fears of this particular group of soldiers offer something of a microcosmic view into the life of all Civil War regiments, Union or Confederate. The chronological examination uses both primary and secondary source materials, including several previously unpublished manuscript collections, in order to discover the often-overlooked history of these men, their regiment, and its important role in the American Civil War.

FROM NEW BERN TO BENNETT PLACE  
WITH COOKE'S "FOOT CAVALRY"  
A HISTORY OF THE TWENTY-SEVENTH  
REGIMENT OF NORTH CAROLINA TROOPS  
1861-1865

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Christopher C. Bingham

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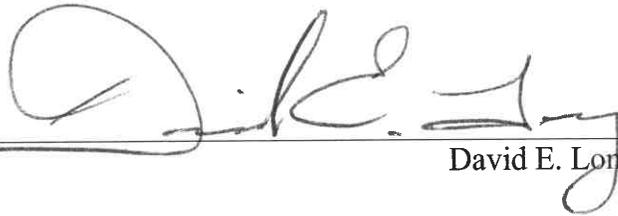
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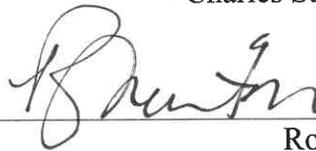
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Dedicated to the officers and men of the "Tuckahoe Braves"  
Company D, Twenty-Seventh Regiment of North Carolina Troops.

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## **Introduction**

During the American Civil War, North Carolina contributed nearly 120,000 men to the ranks of the Confederate States Army. The vast majority of these were concentrated in sixty infantry regiments. One of these units, the Twenty-Seventh Regiment of North Carolina Troops, was formed in New Bern, North Carolina in September of 1861. Of the ten companies that made up the Twenty-Seventh, eight hailed from eastern North Carolina and two came from the piedmont region of the state. The men of the regiment were a mixed lot of farmers, laborers, merchants, artisans and students. Slave owners and yeoman farmers, the men volunteered, in many cases before North Carolina officially seceded, in order to defend their communities, their state, and their institutions, including slavery, from possible Federal coercion and invasion. Over the course of the war, additional volunteers, as well as conscripts and substitutes, would provide replacements as disease and continued combat gutted the strength of the regiment time and again. By the end of the war, of the nearly 1500 officers and men that had served in the regiment, barely 117, representing nine entire companies, received their paroles at Appomattox Court House. The remnants of one final company were surrendered in North Carolina following the meeting of Johnston and Sherman at the Bennett Place.

Initially stationed in eastern North Carolina, the regiment was transferred to Virginia in late May of 1862 and in time became a vital element of Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Although on the side lines during the Seven Days Campaign and absent from the battles of Second Manassas, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, thanks to a

stint of garrison duty in the Carolinas, the unit was nearly indispensable in several important and hard fought battles, including Sharpsburg, Fredericksburg, the Wilderness, Cold Harbor, and Reams' Station. At Sharpsburg, Maryland on September 17, 1862 the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina and the Third Arkansas, both under the command of the Twenty-Seventh's colonel, John Rogers Cooke, participated in a sharp counterattack that disrupted Union attacks between the West Woods and the Sunken Road and helped ward off Confederate defeat following the fall of the "Bloody Lane." During the Battle of Fredericksburg, on December 13, 1862, the regiment held a portion of the famous stone wall at the foot of Marye's Heights against repeated Union attacks, helping to repulse each in turn. At the Wilderness on the afternoon of May 5, 1864 the regiment, and the other North Carolina units in Cooke's Brigade, held a portion of the Confederate line north of the Orange Plank Road against continued Union assaults, both inflicting and suffering heavy casualties in the process. This brave stand against vastly superior numbers allowed A.P. Hill's hard pressed Third Corps to survive until nightfall brought an end to the fighting. Finally, at Reams' Station, on August 25, 1864, the Twenty-Seventh participated in a direct frontal assault on entrenched soldiers of the Union Second Corps, driving them from their breastworks and fending off a serious threat to the Weldon Railroad, the main artery of supplies for Lee's army defending Petersburg.

In addition to these contributions toward Confederate victory, the sheer tenacity and determination of the officers and men of the regiment was demonstrated on numerous occasions. Probably the best example of this occurred on October 14, 1863 at the Battle of Bristoe Station, in which the Twenty-Seventh, along with its parent brigade

of four North Carolina regiments and a second brigade of North Carolinians, launched a bold but ultimately futile frontal assault on a strong position defended by superior Union numbers and firepower. Following this severe bloodletting, in which the regiment suffered more than fifty-percent casualties, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh and surrounding units managed to carefully fall back while maintaining relative order and discipline in the face of the victorious enemy. The determination and sacrifice shown by these “Tar Heels” in this little known battle eerily resembled that shown by the men of Pickett and Pettigrew’s divisions at Gettysburg on July 3, 1863. Following Bristoe Station, the regiment would continue to fight fiercely and remain one of most reliable units in the Army of Northern Virginia right up until its surrender at Appomattox. The Twenty-Seventh North Carolina proved to be a tough, reliable, and indispensable unit with a superb combat record, specifically honored on more than one occasion by Robert E. Lee himself. More than that, the history of the regiment provides a perfect example of the excellent qualities, such as courage, honor, duty, and commitment, which were inherent in the soldiers of both sides, Union and Confederate, who served and fought for what they believed to be right.

Despite its place as one of the best regiments in Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia, recent historians have largely overlooked the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina. It is true that a short article length history has been written to accompany a roster of the regiment, found in Weymouth T. Jordan’s *North Carolina Troops, 1861-65: A Roster Vol. VII*, but there has yet to appear a detailed book length study of this fascinating and important North Carolina regiment. The reason for this oversight, in the author’s humble opinion,

revolves around the Twenty-Seventh not being present at Gettysburg, a battle that seems to draw a remarkable, though understandable, amount of Civil War scholarship, both amateur and professional. In the years following the war, several of the regiment's former officers, including Captains James A. Graham and John A. Sloan, wrote fairly detailed histories of the Twenty-Seventh. In terms of Twentieth Century historians, however, only Douglass Southall Freeman, in his famous series *Lee's Lieutenants*, paid any attention whatever to the regiment, and that only in passing. The following history of the Twenty-Seventh Regiment of North Carolina Troops, based chiefly upon primary source material, will hopefully fill this great void.

## Chapter 1—1861

**“Our duties were very light. Still, some of the boys kicked because we were not sent to the front in Virginia where fighting was going on.”**

**- Private Robert Howell, Company A<sup>1</sup>**

Compared to the states of the Deep South, North Carolina, as well as the other states of the Upper South, did not rush to secession following the election of Abraham Lincoln. The Old North State, although committed to the institution of slavery and possessing a large slave population, was markedly different from the cotton producing states that formed the Confederacy in early 1861. Most North Carolinians did not own slaves but rather belonged to the class of Yeoman farmers that made up much of the state's population. In addition, the great strides in transportation, industrialization and education made in the 1850's, as well as strong economic ties with the Border States and the North, made North Carolina one of the more progressive states south of the Mason Dixon Line. Unlike many Southern states, North Carolina's road to secession and war was marked by a propensity towards conditional Unionism on the part of many in the state. To most North Carolinians, secession remained the final step to be taken if the Lincoln administration attempted to coerce the seceded states back into the Union. The small but vocal secessionist crowd, mostly concentrated in the eastern part of the state,

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Phillips Howell, “Robert Howell Memoirs,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 6.

where the dependence on slave labor was the most entrenched, was forced to acknowledge this reality.<sup>2</sup>

In February of 1861, the conservative Unionist majority within the state defeated the election of a convention to decide the matter of secession. Nevertheless, North Carolina's "watch and wait" disposition was challenged in mid April with the firing on Fort Sumter and Lincoln's subsequent call for 75,000 volunteers to subdue the rebellion. When Governor John W. Ellis, an avowed secessionist, received orders from the Secretary of War on April 15 to form two regiments of infantry to assist in coercing the seceded states, he quickly wrote back that he would be "no party to this wicked violation of the laws of the county, and to this war upon the liberties of a free people. You can get no troops from North Carolina." This turn of events, in addition to the secession of Virginia on April 17, which effectively surrounded North Carolina with Confederate territory, united most North Carolinians around the banner of secession, although a small Unionist minority remained. A state secession convention was organized in mid May and on the twentieth passed an ordinance of secession, effectively separating North Carolina from the United States and, with the ratification of the Confederate Constitution on the same day, joining the state to the Confederacy.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of military preparedness, North Carolina officially began gearing up for war on April 17, when Governor Ellis called for volunteers from the militia to defend the state. However, individual volunteer companies had been organizing across the state

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<sup>2</sup> William C. Harris, *North Carolina and the Coming of the Civil War*, (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1988), 1-34; John G. Barrett, *North Carolina in the Civil War*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 3-13.

<sup>3</sup> Harris, *Coming of the Civil War*, 35-56; Barrett, *North Carolina in the Civil War*, 14-18.

weeks and months prior to this call. On May 1, the legislature expanded North Carolina's commitments to defense by endorsing the mustering of 30,000 troops and levying \$200,000 for the manufacture and purchase of arms; additional funds would soon be forthcoming. The troops who answered the call to defend the state, largely organized by Adjutants General James G. Martin and Robert F. Hoke, were initially formed into two separate groups: ten regiments of State Troops, including one regiment of cavalry and another of artillery, were enlisted for three-years or the duration of the war, while fourteen regiments of Volunteers, most of them infantry formations, were organized for six or twelve months service, depending on their date of enlistment. Any regiments formed after the Fourteenth Volunteers were simply known as North Carolina Troops, although they were in effect also volunteers who signed on for twelve months service, while the First through Fourteenth Volunteers were later turned into regiments of North Carolina Troops with the addition of a ten to their numerical designation. This somewhat confusing re-organization allowed the three-year State Troops to keep their original unit designations when the switch was made in late 1861 and early 1862. In addition, numerous companies from throughout the state remained independent entities waiting to be attached to a regimental organization. This was the case for the ten companies of infantry that would eventually form the Twenty-Seventh Regiment of North Carolina Troops in September 1861.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Greg Mast, *State Troops and Volunteers: A Photographic Record of North Carolina's Civil War Soldiers, Volume 1*, (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1995), 21-26; Barrett, 17-29; Richard B. McCaslin, *Portraits of Conflict: A Photographic History of North Carolina in the Civil War*, (Fayetteville, AK: The University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 37-42.

The organization of these individual companies that would eventually make up the regiment was well under way before North Carolina's official act of secession. As young men from the eastern and piedmont regions of the state rushed to enlist in newly forming volunteer companies, hundreds of them would unknowingly enroll in units destined to be attached to the regiment. These companies, recruited from tight-knit communities in various counties, were a reflection of those communities, both in terms of economics and ideology. Chances were that if a region were predominately rural in nature, the majority of volunteers from that area would be farmers and farm laborers by occupation. On the other hand, a more urban setting would most likely include large numbers of artisans and professionals. If a particular county had a large slave population, it is feasible to assume that many of the newly enlisted soldiers from that county came from, or were close to, slave-owning families and would have a high degree of interest in protecting the slave system and their own economic well-being from Northern abolitionism and so called "Black-Republican" rule. Conversely, volunteers from areas with few slaves may have enlisted for other more patriotic reasons, such as the defense of the community from invasion and the prevention of Federal coercion of friends and neighbors. With nearly 1500 men serving in the ranks of the Twenty-Seventh at one time or another throughout the war, many different occupations and ideological motivations were present within the different companies that made up the regiment. By looking into the backgrounds and early histories of each company, one can gain a better understanding of these men who volunteered to fight for their state and communities.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mast, *State Troops and Volunteers*, 21-25; Weymouth T. Jordan, Jr., ed., and Louis H. Manarin, *North*

The oldest company that would serve in the regiment was undoubtedly the “Orange Guards” of Orange County. Organized at Hillsborough in 1855 as a volunteer militia unit, the company included young men from some of the most prominent families in the area. Orange County in 1860 was a thriving Piedmont community of nearly 17,000 people, over 5,000 of them being slaves. Although most of the population was rural, there being nearly 1,400 farms and plantations in the county, the courthouse town of Hillsborough, as well as other small towns and villages scattered across the landscape, counted sixty-one manufacturing establishments, ranging from grist mills to blacksmith and carpenters’ shops, employing hundreds of workers and artisans, white and black. Meanwhile, the town of Chapel Hill was home to the University of North Carolina, the preeminent educational institution in the state. The men of the company, most of whom were between the ages of seventeen and thirty, mirrored the economics of their home county. While nearly half were listed as farmers or farm laborers, the other half of the company’s complement was made up of artisans or professionals, including several merchants and clerks. Despite the closeness of the university and other educational institutions there were surprisingly few students enlisted in the company.<sup>6</sup>

In the spring of 1861, many of the original members remained in the ranks and prepared for possible war with the Federal government. In their preparations for service, the men elected their own officers and non-commissioned officers, a practice performed almost universally among volunteers, both North and South, in the early months of the

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*Carolina Troops, 1861-1865, A Roster, Volume VIII, Infantry, 27<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> Regiments*, (Raleigh: North Carolina Office of Archives and History, 2004), 7-98.

<sup>6</sup> University of Virginia and the U.S. Census Bureau, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, “Historical Census Browser,” 2005, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/>, data for Orange County, North Carolina in 1860.

war. In this election, Pride Jones was elected captain, Joseph C. Webb, a druggist, first lieutenant, lawyer John Washington Graham second lieutenant, and James Y. Whitted, a tobacco-manufacturer, third lieutenant. As was usually the case in other companies, the newly elected officers were wealthy, educated and prominent members of the community. One of the non-commissioned officers and future captain of the company was Corporal James Augustus Graham, a student from Hillsborough and an avid letter writer during the war. Graham was the son of William Alexander Graham, a former U.S. Senator and North Carolina Governor as well as a future member of the Confederate Congress.<sup>7</sup>

Initially clothed and equipped at their own expense, the “Orange Guards” formed up on April 20, 1861 and headed off to war. Their destination was Fort Macon, a recently captured masonry fortification guarding the entrance to Beaufort harbor. It was also on this day that the company signed on for a term of twelve months, but had yet to be officially mustered into the service of the state. Riding the cars of the North Carolina and North Carolina and Atlantic railroads via Raleigh and Goldsboro, the company arrived in Morehead City, across Bogue Sound from the fort, the next morning. According to Corporal Graham, “We stayed at Morehead City on Saturday night and slept on the floor of a warehouse. Had a pretty rough time of it and felt next morning as though we had not slept at all; for we were as sore as could be.”<sup>8</sup> Despite this uncomfortable opening to active service, the company was soon comfortably billeted

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<sup>7</sup> H. M. Wagstaff, ed., *The James A. Graham Papers, 1861-1884*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1928), 93; Jordan and Manarin, *North Carolina Troops*, 61-73.

<sup>8</sup> Wagstaff, *James Graham Papers*, 103.

within the somewhat cramped casemates of the fort; “There are about 40 of us in a room about 35 feet long and 15 feet wide. The officers are in another room, but I am as well fixed as I would wish to be.”<sup>9</sup> The appearance of the fort and its environs was commented on by several members of the “Orange Guards” in letters home over the next few days and weeks. Private Henry C. McCauley stated, “The fort is a beautiful place surrounded by water and must be very strong if well fortified which will be done in a few days.”<sup>10</sup> Improving the defenses of the brick fort in preparation for a possible enemy attack and drilling in infantry and artillery tactics would be the main occupations of the “Orange Guards,” as well as the other companies garrisoned at Fort Macon, for the next several months.<sup>11</sup>

Guilford County, much like Orange, was a populous and prosperous Piedmont community. In 1860, the population of the county stood at over 20,000 people, fewer than 3,600 of whom were slaves. Like Orange County, Guilford was quite rural in character, containing more than 1,500 farms and plantations, but was also home to the rapidly industrializing railroad towns of Greensboro and High Point as well as numerous, albeit small, manufacturing enterprises. In addition, the county was home to several educational institutions, including Guilford College and the Greensboro Female College. The men of the “Guilford Grays,” a militia company organized in early 1860 largely in response to John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry, Virginia, like their comrades in the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> H. C. McCauley, Fort Macon, North Carolina, to Jim [McCauley, Orange County, North Carolina], April 28, 1861, Charles J. Watson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Branch, *Fort Macon, A History*, (Charleston, SC: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1999), 83-100; Jordan and Manarin, 61-73.

“Orange Guards,” eventually found themselves serving in the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina. In terms of occupations, the overwhelmingly young men who joined the “Guilford Grays” were a very diverse lot. Less than one-third made their living as farmers or farm laborers while nearly twenty percent were students and many more worked as common laborers, artisans and clerks. This diversity would tend to support the fact that many of the volunteers were from the vicinity of Greensboro and other small towns and villages within the county. With few slaves in the county and a fairly diversified economy, war fever was somewhat subdued in the days leading up to the company’s departure. According to Sergeant John A. Sloan, the company’s unofficial historian, the secession of Virginia and Lincoln’s call for troops changed all that. As was true for many parts of the state and the upper South, “This proclamation was the out-burst of the storm and with lightning speed the current of events rushed on to the desolating war so soon to ensue.”<sup>12</sup>

Whatever their feelings on the politics of the moment, the men of the “Guilford Grays” prepared for war with much the same measures as the other volunteer companies forming throughout the state. The company was initially armed with antiquated flintlock smoothbore muskets from the Fayetteville Arsenal. The company’s flashy uniforms, on the other hand, provided at their own expense, had been expertly made in Philadelphia

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<sup>12</sup> John A. Sloan, *Reminiscences of the Guilford Grays, Co. B, 27<sup>th</sup> N.C. Regiment*, (Washington, D.C.: R. O. Polkinhorn, Printer, 1883), 16; Blackwell P. Robinson, and Alexander R. Stoesen, *The History of Guilford County, North Carolina, U.S.A. to 1980, A.D.*, (Greensboro, NC: Guilford County Bicentennial Commission, 1989), 73-100; Mary A. Browning and Dixie Matheny Normandy, eds., *Guilford County 1860: Annotated Abstract of the U.S. Population Schedule of 1860 for Guilford County, North Carolina*, (Greensboro: The Guilford County Genealogical Society, 1991); University of Virginia and U.S. Census Bureau, “Historical Census Browser,” <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/>, data for Guilford County, North Carolina in 1860.

the year before and consisted of “a gray frock coat, single breasted, with two rows of state buttons, pants to match, with black stripe, waist belt of black leather, cross belt of white webbing, gray cap with pompon.”<sup>13</sup> Another prized possession of the company was their blue silk flag, which had been presented to them by the ladies of the Edgeworth Female Academy in 1860. It measured six by five feet and was adorned with the state seal of North Carolina on one side and had the name of the company emblazoned on the other.<sup>14</sup>

On April 18, 1861, the company, which consisted of many of the original members, met in the county courthouse in Greensboro where elections were held for officers and non-commissioned officers. John Sloan, a prominent local merchant, was re-elected captain. In keeping with the tradition of electing well educated men to lead them, the men of the company chose lawyers William Adams, James T. Morehead Jr., and John Alexander Gilmer Jr. as lieutenants. Both Captain Sloan and Third Lieutenant Gilmer, the son of Congressman John A. Gilmer of Greensboro, would eventually rise to the rank of colonel. The day before, Governor Ellis had ordered the company to Goldsboro but these orders were countermanded and the unit was ordered to report to Colonel C. C. Tew at Fort Macon instead. On the evening of April 18, the “Guilford Grays” left Greensboro by rail and arrived at the fort on the evening of the twentieth, where they enlisted for twelve months service. Sergeant Sloan described the mood of the men during this trip, “The Grays, young, ardent, and full of enthusiasm, were the most light-hearted and happy

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<sup>13</sup> Sloan, *Guilford Grays*, 5-6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10; Glenn Dedmond, *The Flags of Civil War North Carolina*, (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2003), 120.

of all, as if on the way to some festive entertainment.”<sup>15</sup> Upon their arrival, the men of the company joined the “Orange Guards,” and other troops, in making themselves comfortable within the casemates, drilling, and making the fort as ready as possible for an enemy attack.<sup>16</sup>

Many of the soldiers in the “Guilford Grays,” as mentioned earlier, harbored a somewhat conditional militancy toward the Union at this point in the war. With North Carolina’s secession still not a reality, most of the men felt that they were simply protecting the sovereignty of their state, not fighting for the independence of the Southern Confederacy. Sergeant Sloan best described these feelings, which may have been present in many companies, recalling an incident that occurred at Fort Macon in late April:

Upon arrival at the fort, “we saw floating from the flagstaff the Pine Tree flag, with the rattlesnake coiled around the base. This was the State flag. About ten days afterwards for some cause, and by what authority is not known, the State flag was pulled down and a Confederate flag run up in its place. North Carolina had not officially seceded, and this was looked upon as an unwarrantable assumption of command, and some of our company left for home, but returned when the State afterwards seceded.”<sup>17</sup>

In comparison to this reaction, the men of the “Orange Guards” mentioned the raising of the Confederate flag, which had been fashioned by the ladies of Beaufort and Morehead City, over the fort but it seems it did not cause them to question their service. Despite this incident, the official secession of North Carolina on May 20 and the state’s subsequent joining of the Confederacy united the men of the various companies in common cause whatever their previous beliefs on the matter may have been.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Sloan, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 8, 20-31; Sloan, 22; Harris, 48-49.

<sup>17</sup> Sloan, 22.

<sup>18</sup> Branch, *Fort Macon*, 83-100; Wagstaff, 104.

Another company that was quickly shuffled to Fort Macon in the early days of the war was the “Goldsboro Rifles.” Hailing from the courthouse seat of Wayne County, this company, like the remaining seven to be discussed, was made up of men from eastern North Carolina, a region, which, compared with the Piedmont counties of the state, was slightly more in tune with the economics and culture of the Deep South. The largest difference between the two sections, as will be seen, was the sheer number of slaves present in most eastern counties. Wayne County in 1860 had a population of approximately 15,000, including nearly 5,500 slaves. Although a white majority county, unlike most of its neighbors to the east, Wayne was much more agricultural in character than the previously discussed counties of Orange and Guilford. Despite the presence of the growing railroad town of Goldsboro, there were only nineteen manufacturing establishments listed in the 1860 census compared with 665 farms and plantations.<sup>19</sup>

The “Goldsboro Rifles,” organized in April 1861, was made up mostly of young men from the area in and around Goldsboro. As such, despite the rural character of the county, farmers and farm laborers made up only about half of the company, the remainder being a mix of artisans and professionals. Private Robert Phillips Howell of the company gave a hint at his reasons for joining up: “we believed then, as I always shall, that the South had the Constitutional right to secede....when I consider the temper of the Southern people I am not surprised at their course.”<sup>20</sup> The belief in the right of secession and the need to protect Southern institutions, including slavery, from possible

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<sup>19</sup> University of Virginia and U.S. Census Bureau, “Historical Census Browser,” <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/>, data for Wayne County, North Carolina in 1860.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Phillips Howell, “Robert Howell Memoirs,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 6.

Northern coercion, especially with a Republican in the White House, probably had a similar effect on many in Wayne County and the rest of eastern North Carolina.<sup>21</sup>

In electing officers for the company, the men chose Dr. Marshall D. Craton as captain, Stephen Monroe Hunt, a tinner, as first lieutenant, merchant William Andrews second lieutenant, and tailor Stephen D. Phillips third lieutenant. In terms of equipment, the men wore privately purchased uniforms consisting of matching blue or gray frock coats, pants and caps, and, despite their designation, were most likely armed by state authorities with old smoothbore muskets. Epitomizing their confidence in the Southern cause and North Carolina's eventual secession, the unit's flag, which had been given to them by the ladies of the Wayne Female College, was a copy of the Confederate "first national" design with the slogan "Victory or Death" emblazoned on one side. After organizing in Goldsboro, on April 15, 1861, the "Rifles" were ordered to take Fort Macon, which, unknown to Governor Ellis, had already been seized from its Federal caretaker by local militia the day before. Private Howell wrote that the takeover of the fort "was easily done, as it had not been garrisoned in several years."<sup>22</sup> When Captain Craton and the company arrived, they officially occupied the fort and enlisted for twelve months, although they would not be officially mustered into state service until June 13. On April 17, Governor Ellis ordered Craton to prepare the fort for defense. As

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<sup>21</sup> Frances Godwin Howell, ed., *North Carolina, Wayne County, 1860 Census*, (Goldsboro, NC: Frances Godwin Howell, 1988).

<sup>22</sup> Robert Phillips Howell, "Robert Howell Memoirs," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 6.

previously mentioned, the “Guilford Grays” and “Orange Guards” quickly joined the men of the “Goldsboro Rifles” in their endeavors.<sup>23</sup>

A second company organized in Wayne County, and which eventually was attached to the regiment, was known as the “Saulston Volunteers.” This company, unlike their comrades from Goldsboro, was certainly raised in a very rural part of the county. Of the men whose occupations are known, more than eighty percent were listed as farmers or farm laborers, while very small numbers of artisans and professionals made up the remainder. Enlisted and mustered into state service on June 10, 1861, following North Carolina’s secession, the “Volunteers” chose Benjamin T. Barden as captain, Daniel T. Howell, a Deputy Sheriff of Wayne County, as first lieutenant, Joseph C. Lewis, second lieutenant, and Redin C. Barden, Captain Barden’s younger brother, third lieutenant. With the exception of First Lieutenant Howell, all of the company’s officers were listed in the 1860 Census as being farm laborers still working on their parents’ farms. After being equipped by state and local authorities, the “Saulston Volunteers” were ordered to Fort Lane on the Neuse River below New Bern. Here they would join other troops in drilling and learning the rudimentary skills of war as well as preparing the defenses of New Bern for a possible enemy attack.<sup>24</sup>

Wayne County’s eastern neighbor, Lenoir County, also mustered two companies that would ultimately join the Twenty-Seventh. Lenoir in 1860 was a black majority

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<sup>23</sup> Dedmond, *Flags of North Carolina*, 118-19; Branch, 83-100; Jordan and Manarin, 11-20; Mast, 59, 101;

<sup>24</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 90-98; Coletta A. Crews, “Wayne County, North Carolina, A Place and a People: 1860-1880,” (M.A. Thesis, East Carolina University, 1995), 1-36; Howell, *Wayne County Census*; United States War Department, *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Vol. 49*, “Record of Events for Twenty-Seventh North Carolina Infantry,” (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing Co., 1994-), 32-33.

county. Of a total population of just over 10,000, more than 5,000 were slaves. Like Wayne, Lenoir was extremely rural. Despite the presence of the town of Kinston, which contained several manufacturing industries, the vast majority of the county's inhabitants were agrarian in nature. Two companies that mustered into service from the county included the "North Carolina Guards," raised near the village of Mosley Hall in the western section of the county, and the "Tuckahoe Braves," which consisted of men from the southern or "Trent" district. Both companies' complements mirrored the agricultural character of the county. The "Guards" was made up of nearly ninety-percent farmers, while the "Braves," possibly drawing some of its recruits from the Kinston area, showed a slightly more diverse background but still contained almost seventy-percent farmers or farm laborers.<sup>25</sup>

The men of the "North Carolina Guards" enlisted on April 17, 1861 for twelve months service and elected officers, all of whom were farmers by occupation. George F. Whitfield, a wealthy slave-owner and the chief organizer of the company, was elected captain, while John P. Wooten, Benjamin Waters, and Thomas W. Rouse were chosen as first, second and third lieutenants respectively. On April 23, Governor Ellis ordered Captain Whitfield to report to Fort Macon with the company. According to Whitfield, "I reported with the Co. on the 25<sup>th</sup>, but the garrison being sufficient in strength, Col. Tew ordered us to Goldsboro to establish a camp of instruction."<sup>26</sup> Despite not being

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<sup>25</sup> Russell King, ed., *1860 Census Lenoir County, North Carolina*, (LaGrange, NC: Russell King, 199-?); University of Virginia and U.S. Census Bureau, "Historical Census Browser," <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/>, data for Lenoir County, North Carolina in 1860.

<sup>26</sup> George F. Whitfield, "Descriptive Book of the North Carolina Guards," Civil War Collection, State Archives, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

officially mustered into the service of the state until June 6, drill and preparation for combat became the duties of the company for the next several months.

The “Tuckahoe Braves,” meanwhile, were enlisted for twelve months on April 27 and elected their officers. William T. Wooten, a middle-aged gristmill owner, was elected captain of the company, while James G. Davis, Calvin Herring, and Cornelius Harper, all of whom were most likely farmers, received the offices of first, second, and third lieutenant respectively. Locally clothed and equipped, the “Braves” trained in Lenoir County until officially mustered into state service and ordered to New Bern on June 20, 1861. Their camp outside the city, most likely at the fairgrounds, which had been re-named Camp Gatlin after General Richard Gatlin, the commander of the Department of North Carolina, stood very close to Fort Lane and put them in close proximity to the “Saulston Volunteers.” Like the other volunteer companies organizing across the state, the “Braves” drilled in the manual of arms, became accustomed to camp duties and routine, and slowly made the transition from citizens to soldiers.<sup>27</sup>

Pitt County, located north of Lenoir, likewise contributed two companies that would eventually serve in the regiment. Pitt County in 1860 had one of the largest slave populations in the state and was home to numerous farms and plantations. In addition, the county had the highest number of slave-owners of any county that produced troops for the regiment. Census records from 1860 list a total population of more than 16,000, only a little over 7,000 of whom were white. While there were nearly 1,000 farming

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<sup>27</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 31-46; Clifford C. Tyndall, “Lenoir County During the Civil War,” (M.A. Thesis, East Carolina University, 1981), 1-25; U.S. War Department, *Supplement to OR, Vol. 49*, “Record of Events,” 26-28.

operations present in the county, industry, aside from several mills and shops in Greenville and elsewhere, was almost non-existent. From this rural landscape and pro-secession community came the “Pitt Volunteers” and the “Marlboro Guards,” both of which were formed on April 20, 1861, a full month prior to North Carolina’s secession. A general lack of records on the men of the two companies makes any positive details of their pre-war lives difficult. However it is safe to assume that the extremely rural nature of the county most likely translated into the ranks. Therefore one can estimate that a very high number of the new recruits were farmers and farm workers by trade and that, like many of their comrades in other volunteer companies, they were mostly young men in their late teens and early twenties.<sup>28</sup>

The “Pitt Volunteers” held company elections during their first week of existence and elected several members of the Singletary family, a prominent and wealthy Pitt County lineage. Greenville lawyer and state legislator George Badger Singletary was elected captain, while Richard Singletary was chosen as first lieutenant and Thomas C. Singletary as third lieutenant. The company apparently remained without the services of a second lieutenant until August when William Bernard was elected to the position. During the summer of 1861, the unit was raked by continual changes in its command structure that will be detailed later. Meanwhile, the “Marlboro Guards” elected William H. Morrill captain and chose merchant Joseph B. Barrett as first lieutenant. Amos J. Hines and Edward Moore were elected as second and third lieutenants, but it is unclear as to exactly which man occupied which position.

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<sup>28</sup> University of Virginia and U.S. Census Bureau, “Historical Census Browser,” <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/>, data for Pitt County, North Carolina in 1860.

The “Pitt Volunteers” were officially mustered into state service on June 1, 1861 and ordered to New Bern to begin training. The “Marlboro Guards,” on the other hand, although also stationed at Camp Gatlin near New Bern, were not taken into state service until June 21, 1861 because the company was not up to authorized strength, which stood at a minimum of sixty men. This problem was alleviated on June 19, 1861 when twenty-seven men from the “Volunteers” were transferred to the “Guards.” Following this transfer, command adjustments were made which changed the command structure of each company. This restructuring was not completed until both companies were attached to the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina in September. During the summer months, the two Pitt County companies, alongside their comrades of the “Tuckahoe Braves” and the “Saulston Volunteers,” drilled, trained, and became accustomed to army life at Camp Gatlin.<sup>29</sup>

In May 1861, Perquimans County formed a volunteer company known as the “Perquimans Beauregards.” In 1860, this county, located in the Albemarle region in the northeastern corner of the state, was a very rural community of just over 7,000 inhabitants, roughly half of whom were slaves. The “Beauregards,” whose very name implied full support for the nascent Confederate nation, which North Carolina had yet to join, were formed and equipped in Hertford, the largest town in the county, on May 16, 1861 and accepted into state service, as twelve month volunteers, on the same day. Originally consisting of both infantry and cavalry contingents, the company was quickly

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<sup>29</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 46-53, 73-82; Henry T. King, *Sketches of Pitt County: A Brief History of the County, 1704-1910*, (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, 1911), 118-21; U.S. War Department, *Supplement to OR, Vol. 49*, “Record of Events,” 28-31.

relegated to an all infantry force when it became clear that the state did not require a mounted company. In electing officers and non-commissioned officers, the men, most of whom were probably farmers by trade, chose William Nixon as captain, Dr. Thomas Duncan Martin of nearby Pasquotank County as first lieutenant, Joshua W. White as second lieutenant, and Thomas D. Jones, a clerk, as third lieutenant. On July 1, Dr. Martin was detailed to work in a New Bern military hospital. Despite his continued absence for the remainder of the year, the company did not elect a new first lieutenant until Martin finally resigned in April 1862.<sup>30</sup>

Awaiting orders until early July, the company remained camped in Perquimans County, drilled, adapted to camp routine and, much like their comrades in other companies, became somewhat accustomed to military life. Orders finally arrived on July 15 for the company to proceed to New Bern. According to Captain Dixon, "In compliance with this order we left Perquimans River on board the steamer *Curlew*, crossing Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds, and Neuse River to New Bern, this being the cheapest and nearly as expeditious route as any other."<sup>31</sup> Upon their arrival in New Bern two days later, the "Beauregards" reported to Camp Gatlin and continued their training for war alongside the "Tuckahoe Braves" as well as the "Pitt Volunteers" and "Marlboro Guards."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> University of Virginia and U.S. Census Bureau, "Historical Census Browser," <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/>, data for Perquimans County, North Carolina in 1860.

<sup>31</sup> U.S. War Department, *Supplement to OR, Vol. 49*, "Record of Events," 28-29.

<sup>32</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 53-61; Charlotte S. Norris and Ann P. Sawyer, eds., *1860 Census of Perquimans County*, (South Mills, NC: Charlotte S. Norris and Ann P. Sawyer, 1992).

The final company to be formed, which would eventually serve in the Twenty-Seventh, was the “Southern Rights Infantry” of Jones County. Located between Kinston and New Bern, Jones County in 1860 was a black majority county inhabited by 5,700 people, including 3,400 slaves. Despite its rural character and reliance on slave labor, small industry was also present in the county. The 1860 Census listed more than seventy manufacturing establishments. Most of the volunteers from the county probably worked as farmers or small-scale artisans. As the title of the company implies, the men who made up the “Southern Rights Infantry” were obviously very concerned with the politics of the day and it is likely that many of the volunteers were either slave-owners themselves or came from slaveholding families.<sup>33</sup>

Organized for twelve months and mustered into state service on June 17, 1861, the company selected William P. Ward as captain, John H. Nethercutt, first lieutenant and Franklin Foy, second lieutenant. The company made do without a third lieutenant until September 5, when Kenneth Rayner Jones was elected to the position. Given the agricultural character of the county, it is very likely that at least some of these officers, like the men they commanded, earned their living through planting or farming before the war. On the same day of their muster, the “Southern Rights Infantry” were ordered to report to Camp Gatlin for training. Making the short trip by either rail or foot, the men of the company arrived in camp that evening and were quickly on their way to becoming soldiers.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> University of Virginia and U.S. Census Bureau, “Historical Census Browser,” <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/>, data for Jones County, North Carolina in 1860.

<sup>34</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 82-90; U.S. War Department, *Supplement to OR, Vol. 49*, “Record of Events,” 31-32.

By June 20, 1861 all ten companies had been officially mustered into the service of the state of North Carolina as twelve-month volunteers. Despite the fact that many of the units had been on duty for nearly two months, none of the companies were yet organized into any battalion or regimental structure. As things stood on June 20, the “Goldsboro Rifles,” “Orange Guards,” and “Guilford Grays” were serving at Fort Macon, under the temporary command of Captain Pride Jones of the “Orange Guards,” drilling and preparing the fort for action. According to Corporal Graham, the soldiers at the fort “have some hard work to do, but we are prepared for them no matter when they come.”<sup>35</sup> The “North Carolina Guards,” having been training near Goldsboro since late April, had recently been ordered to New Bern where they were now in camp. The remaining six companies, including the “Tuckahoe Braves,” “Saulston Volunteers,” “Pitt Volunteers,” “Marlboro Guards,” “Perquimans Beauregards,” and “Southern Rights Infantry,” were also encamped in and around New Bern, particularly at Camp Gatlin and Fort Lane, both of which were located south of the city.<sup>36</sup>

During the first week of June, state military authorities, as well as some of the individual company commanders, particularly Captains Pride Jones and George B. Singletary, made attempts to organize several of the independent companies in eastern North Carolina into the Ninth North Carolina Volunteers. This regiment would have included the three companies then serving at Fort Macon as well as the four companies from Pitt and Lenoir counties then at New Bern, in addition to three other local

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<sup>35</sup> Wagstaff, 103.

<sup>36</sup> Branch, 94-100; Jordan and Manarin, 1; George F. Whitfield, “Descriptive Book of the North Carolina Guards,” Civil War Collection, State Archives, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh; U.S. War Department, *Supplement to OR, Vol. 49*, “Record of Events,” 25-33.

organizations. This list was quickly altered when the Fort Macon garrison was ordered to remain at the fort. The “Southern Rights Infantry,” “Saulston Volunteers,” and a company from Greene County under a Captain Drysdale were quickly transferred to replace them. The officers of the remaining companies met in New Bern on June 22, and elected George B. Singletary of the “Pitt Volunteers” as colonel of the new regiment. His brother, First Lieutenant Richard W. Singletary, now commanded the company.<sup>37</sup>

“Immediately after this organization, Companies D, E, and H, and Captain Drysdale’s company, volunteered for the war—the regiment being only twelve month volunteers—and were assigned to some regiments of State Troops.”<sup>38</sup> Despite the loss, the remaining companies formed a battalion of six companies under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Singletary, having been reduced in rank in accordance with his now smaller command. “Singletary’s Battalion,” as it came to be known, now included the “Pitt Volunteers,” “Marlboro Guards,” “North Carolina Guards,” “Tuckahoe Braves,” “Saulston Volunteers,” and “Southern Rights Infantry.” In August or early September, after petitioning to be placed in the battalion, the “Perquimans Beauregards” were added to Singletary’s command. Remaining at Camp Gatlin, the soldiers of the battalion continued to drill and assisted other regiments and companies in preparing the defenses of New Bern, particularly the batteries under construction along the Neuse River, for a possible Federal attack on the city.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Branch, 94-100; Jordan and Manarin, 1; Walter Clark, ed., *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina in the Great War, 1861-65, Volume II*, (Raleigh: E.M. Uzzell, Printer, 1901), 425-26.

<sup>38</sup> Clark, *Histories of North Carolina Regiments*, 426.

<sup>39</sup> Clark, 426; Jordan and Manarin, 1; U.S. War Department, *Supplement to OR, Vol. 49*, “Record of Events,” 28-29.

In September, state military authorities and the individual company commanders made attempts to organize “Singletary’s Battalion” into a more permanent regimental structure. By this time in the war, North Carolina’s regiments had been transferred to Confederate command and the state authorities had made the switch, at least on paper, from two separate military organizations, State Troops and Volunteers, to a much simpler numerical designation system. As mentioned earlier, all Volunteer regiments through the Fourteenth received an added ten to their unit designation. Under this system, the First through Tenth State Troops retained their numbers and the former Volunteer regiments became the Eleventh through Twenty-Fourth Regiments of North Carolina Troops. By mid September, as the companies of “Singletary’s Battalion” and those stationed at Fort Macon were considered for organization into a new regiment, the next regiment to be formed was the Twenty-Seventh. On September 28, 1861, all ten companies were officially attached to the Twenty-Seventh Regiment of North Carolina Troops as twelve-month volunteers. Private David Thompson of the “Orange Guards” marked the attachment by telling his mother, “Our company the Guilford Grays and the Goldsboro Rifles has been put into the 27<sup>th</sup> Regiment, it was done last week they will elect a Colonel next Saturday.”<sup>40</sup> Unknowingly at the time, despite their twelve-month designation, most of the men in the new regiment would serve within it for the remainder of the war.<sup>41</sup>

Upon the organization of the regiment, a new North Carolina state flag was presumably issued to the unit as its battle standard. The Twenty-Seventh would not

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<sup>40</sup> David Thompson, Fort Macon, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, September 22, 1861, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>41</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 1; McCaslin, *Portraits of Conflict*, 41; Clark, 426-27.

receive a more traditional Confederate battle flag until its attachment to the Army of Northern Virginia in the summer of 1862. In addition, the following company designations were made: the “Goldsboro Rifles” became Company A, the “Guilford Grays” Company B, the “North Carolina Guards” Company C, the “Tuckahoe Braves” Company D, the “Marlboro Guards” Company E, the “Perquimans Beauregards” Company F, the “Orange Guards” Company G, the “Pitt Volunteers” Company H, the “Southern Rights Infantry” Company I, and the “Saulston Volunteers” Company K. According to Private Thompson, writing to his mother on September 29, “All of our officers went to New Bern yesterday, they elected [George B.] Singletary Colonel, Capt. [John] Sloan of the Guilford Grays Lieutenant Colonel and another Singletary Major.”<sup>42</sup> The newly elected major that Private Thompson was referring to was Thomas C. Singletary, formerly third lieutenant of the “Marlboro Guards.” As things stood following this organization, Companies, A, B, and G remained garrisoned at Fort Macon alongside several companies of heavy artillerymen, all under the command of Colonel Moses J. White. Company F was detailed to Forts Ellis and Lane below New Bern, where they were temporarily serving as artillerymen, and the remaining six companies were still on duty at Camp Gatlin.<sup>43</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the men who made up the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina were a diverse lot, both in terms of pre-war occupations and their reasons for joining their respective volunteer companies. With the permanent organization of these units into the

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<sup>42</sup> David Thompson, Fort Macon, North Carolina, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, September 29, 1861, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>43</sup> Dedmond, 16; Branch, 110-15; Jordan and Manarin, 1; Clark, 426-27.

regiment, it may be of interest to take a look into the general makeup of the Twenty-Seventh as a whole. Of the 1,473 individuals who served in the regiment at one time or another throughout the war, roughly 1,046, or seventy-two percent, are known to have enlisted in 1861. The remainder of the soldiers listed in the regimental roster either volunteered, transferred from other regiments, or were conscripted into service during the remainder of the war: 148 in 1862, 98 in 1863, 145 in 1864, and only twelve in the opening months of 1865. Despite the fact that most of the soldiers in the individual companies were from the counties in which those respective units were raised, there were exceptions. Companies B and G, hailing from the Piedmont, attracted additional volunteers from other nearby counties such as Alamance and Chatham while those from eastern North Carolina contained residents of many different local counties from Duplin to Craven and New Hanover. In addition, once conscription became a reality following the spring of 1862, men from all over the state, but particularly the Piedmont counties of Wake, Randolph, Union and Stanly, were forcibly enlisted into the various companies of the regiment depending on their need for new recruits.

Given the rural nature of the counties where most of the men in the regiment originated from, it is not surprising that farmers and farm laborers made up more than sixty-one percent of those whose pre-war occupations are known. Students, common laborers, clerks, and mechanics made up the next largest segments, although combined they accounted for only seventeen percent of the total. The remaining twenty-two percent were a diverse mix of artisans, such as carpenters, blacksmiths, coopers, and shoemakers, and professionals, including merchants, lawyers, and physicians. The

soldiers who enlisted to fight within the regiment, whether volunteers or conscripts, were overwhelmingly young; close to eighty percent of those whose age at enlistment can be determined were under age thirty-one, while less than five percent were forty years of age or older. Finally, the young men who served in the Twenty-Seventh were, for the most part, those with few family responsibilities to detain them at home. Nearly seventy percent of those whose personal status is known were classified as either dependents or single. Of the remainder, many of whom were later volunteers or conscripts, twenty-three percent were married with children and six percent were married without children. In conclusion, the average soldier who volunteered for service in 1861, and was now a member of the new Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, was likely a young single farm worker, in his late teens or early twenties, possibly still living with his parents or guardians, although, as stated earlier, that makeup would change over time.<sup>44</sup>

With most of the volunteers in each company coming from the same local communities, whether rural or urban, it is not surprising that many soldiers fought alongside friends, neighbors, close relatives and more distant kinfolk whom they had known all their lives. By looking at the frequency of surnames within several companies, one can achieve a better understanding of just how close the men of the Twenty-Seventh were to each other. In the “North Carolina Guards” of Lenoir County, for example, ten members of the Sutton family volunteered together in 1861. These men may not all have

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<sup>44</sup> The statistics detailed in the preceding two paragraphs were arrived at through the accumulation of numerous sources including the *North Carolina 1860 Census Index, 2 Vols.*, edited by Ronald Vern Jackson, individual county census indexes for 1860 (all of which can be located in the Bibliography), the detailed roster located in Jordan and Manarin’s *North Carolina Troops, Vol. 8*, the “Descriptive Book of the North Carolina Guards,” by Captain George F. Whitfield, as well as roster sections for Cos. B and G located in Sloan’s, *Guilford Grays* and the *James Graham Papers*.

been blood relatives, but it is likely that they were at least related by marriage. The “Tuckahoe Braves,” also from Lenoir, contained seven men with the last name of Davis and another seven named Taylor. In terms of sheer numbers, Companies F and K, from Perquimans and Wayne County respectively, each listed thirteen members with the same surname. The White and Smith clans, most of whom volunteered from the same area within their counties and at roughly the same time, epitomized the pattern of numerous kinfolk enlisting together to defend their families and homes from a possible Northern invasion. While the closeness of these men adhered them to one another in battle and in camp, it also foreshadowed massive community and family loss in the aftermath of a bloody and costly engagement, in which numerous members of the same family could be killed or severely wounded at the same time, devastating that particular family unit in the process.<sup>45</sup>

As the fall of 1861 began, garrison duties, whether at Camp Gatlin or Fort Macon, continued to dominate the lives of the men of the regiment. Outside of New Bern, seven companies drilled and labored on entrenchments by day and slept in canvas tents by night. In describing the situation at Camp Gatlin, newly elected Third Lieutenant James Graham of Company G, who was visiting the camp, stated, “They have cleared a place in the woods on the bank of the river large enough to pitch their camp and are hard at work clearing more. They are well fixed up.”<sup>46</sup> At Fort Macon meanwhile, almost constant work on the defenses had made the garrison ready for and hopeful of an enemy attack. Lieutenant Graham told his mother “we are very well fixed for them and can give them

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<sup>45</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

<sup>46</sup> Wagstaff, 107.

the hardest fight that they have had anywhere yet.”<sup>47</sup> While most of the garrison remained billeted within the casemates of the fort, some soldiers apparently moved their quarters outside. Private Thompson of Company G wrote, “we have just moved out of the fort into a cabin close by, which is a more pleasant place than inside.”<sup>48</sup> In spite of their work and drill, several soldiers, such as Private Leander Gwynn Hunt of Company B, hoped for a chance to fight, “I don’t think we will be moved from this place soon. I would like to go to Va but some body has to stay at home and I guess it had just as well by our company.”<sup>49</sup> Private Robert Howell of Company A likewise described the mood in his company: “Our duties were very light. Still, some of the boys kicked because we were not sent to the front in Virginia where fighting was going on.”<sup>50</sup> Ultimately, both elements of the regiment would have to wait until March of 1862 to prove their fighting abilities.

Meanwhile, the business of running a volunteer regiment continued. At the regimental level, several changes were made during this time. Second Lieutenant Joshua White of Company F was selected as Quartermaster of the regiment in September while Dr. William J. Blow became its first surgeon in early October. Also during this time, James G. Whitfield of Company D became the first sergeant major of the Twenty-Seventh, the highest ranking non-commissioned officer in the regiment. Throughout the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> David Thompson, Fort Macon, North Carolina, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, August 9, 1861, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>49</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Fort Macon, North Carolina, to M. A. Conrad, Clemmonsville, North Carolina, June 29, 1861, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Phillips Howell, “Robert Howell Memoirs,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 6.

remainder of 1861 numerous changes in command were made at the company level. In Company A, Captain Craton resigned in November after being elected lieutenant colonel of the Thirty-Fifth North Carolina. Second Lieutenant Phillips was quickly elected to fill the vacancy. The promotion of Captain John Sloan of Company B to lieutenant colonel of the regiment necessitated the election of First Lieutenant William Adams as captain of the company. In Company E, Captain William Morrill was appointed Commissary of Subsistence of the regiment in November and replaced by Lieutenant Jason Joyner, who had temporarily served as adjutant of "Singletary's Battalion." Company G had been forced to say goodbye to its first commander, Pride Jones, in August when he resigned from service. First Lieutenant Joseph Webb was quickly elected to replace him. Company H, Colonel Singletary's old company, witnessed several changes during the summer and fall of 1861, but Richard W. Singletary was installed as captain by the time the regiment was officially formed. These changes effected similar adjustments in each affected company through the election of new lieutenants and non-commissioned officers to replace those who moved up in rank.<sup>51</sup>

Supplies of arms and uniforms were also an important matter during the regiment's first months of existence. According to Private Thompson of Company G, writing on September 10, "We got our new guns yesterday, they are the minnie muskets they will shoot 1000 yards, they were taken at Manassas."<sup>52</sup> Whether the other companies of the regiment received new or captured rifle muskets during this period is

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<sup>51</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

<sup>52</sup> David Thompson, Fort Macon, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, September 10, 1861, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

unknown but it is a distinct possibility. In terms of uniforms, state regulations made in May of 1861 called for a standardized uniform that would be purchased by the soldiers themselves with the help of commutation money provided biannually by the Confederate government. Officers, on the other hand, were responsible for purchasing their uniforms out of their own pockets. Private Thompson mentioned in a November letter, "We got part of our pay last Thursday, I got \$26, I subscribed \$12.50 for a uniform, the company made up \$400 the officers put in \$200."<sup>53</sup> In this way, the various companies of the regiment most likely received new jeans-cloth sack coats and trousers from various state contracted manufacturers in the latter months of 1861 to replace their original non-standardized uniforms. Rations during this time were apparently adequate as few soldiers complained of not getting enough to eat. In addition to official sources, the soldiers of the regiment, naturally concerned with their own comfort, turned to those at home to provide them with extra food and clothes. A typical request for food by Private Thompson asked for "cabige, buter, eggs, pickles or anything of the sort,"<sup>54</sup> while Lieutenant Graham inquired of his mother, "if you have my flannel shirts done please send them down."<sup>55</sup> The men of every company throughout the war would utilize this

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<sup>53</sup> David Thompson, Fort Macon, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, November 4, 1861, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>54</sup> David Thompson, Fort Macon, North Carolina, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, October 24, 1861, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>55</sup> Wagstaff, 108-09.

source of supplies, provided that transportation routes remained open and Federal forces did not occupy their homes.<sup>56</sup>

Despite the dull routine of garrison duty during late 1861, one interesting event did take place in early November. Following the capture of Hatteras Inlet by Union troops in August, Colonel Singletary, then in overall command at New Bern, decided to try to assail the Union garrison on Hatteras Island. On November 8, without authorization, Singletary embarked elements of the Twenty-Seventh on a steamer then at New Bern and headed east on the Neuse River towards Pamlico Sound. To guide his expedition, the colonel released two river pilots, who had been suspected of assisting Federal forces, from the New Bern jail. Apparently, Singletary's superior, Brigadier General Daniel Harvey Hill, commander of the Department of North Carolina's District of the Pamlico, learned of his actions and quickly sent orders for him to terminate his expedition, thereby possibly averting a disaster to the regiment. After his return to New Bern, the Twenty-Seventh's commander learned that he was to be court-martialed for disobeying his orders to remain at Camp Gatlin as well as releasing two suspects without authority. In early December, Singletary was found guilty of "conduct prejudicial to good order and military discipline" and sentenced to suspension of rank and pay for a period of two months. Embarrassed and incensed at the court's actions, Colonel Singletary resigned his commission on December 16. A week later, Lieutenant Colonel Sloan was elected to take command of the regiment. On January 6, 1862, Major Thomas C. Singletary moved up to the rank of lieutenant colonel and Second Lieutenant John

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<sup>56</sup> Ron Field, *Brassey's History of Uniforms: American Civil War, Confederate Army*, (London: Brassey's Ltd. 1996), 94-100; Mast, 25-26.

Alexander Gilmer of Company B was elected major. Despite his court-martial and resignation, George Singletary was not out of the war for good. In April of 1862, he was elected colonel of the Forty-Fourth North Carolina.<sup>57</sup>

Despite the absence of any fighting during 1861, the men of the Twenty-Seventh did suffer casualties during the first year of the war. By the end of the year, seventeen men had died of disease or as a result of accidents. Of this total, two men drowned near New Bern, presumably in the Neuse River, and a soldier from the “Guilford Grays” died after he “attempted to commit suicide by cutting his throat with a razor in a fit of temporary derangement of mind.”<sup>58</sup> Diseases such as typhoid fever, measles and pneumonia took the lives of the rest, including two men in the companies detached to Fort Macon. This total, coming out of over 1,000 men who enlisted during the year, is much lower than many regiments, on both sides, whose first months of service often witnessed wholesale death due to the rapid spread of infectious diseases that many new recruits had never before been exposed to. In describing the health of his company, Private Thompson of Company G stated, “there is very little sickness in the fort now except mumps, George has got them [but] he is the only one in the company that has them.”<sup>59</sup> In addition, twenty-four men deserted from the various companies by the end of 1861, although several returned to duty following only a brief absence. Given the fact that only one such deserter was from the two companies hailing from the Piedmont, it is

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<sup>57</sup> Earl J. Hess, *Lee's Tar-Heels: The Pettigrew-Kirkland-MacRae Brigade*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 47; Jordan and Manarin, 7-8.

<sup>58</sup> Wagstaff, 108-09.

<sup>59</sup> David Thompson, Fort Macon, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, November 25, 1861, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

obvious that their closeness to home proved too much for nearly two-dozen easterners to ignore. In addition, there may have been other soldiers who simply took advantage of lax discipline to visit friends and family for a short period before returning to duty unnoticed.<sup>60</sup>

Aside from disease and desertion, numerous men from every company also left the ranks during the months of 1861 by way of discharge, for various reasons, transfer to other units, or resignation. Nevertheless, by the beginning of January 1862, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, under its new colonel, greeted the New Year with continued hopes for action and a chance to prove themselves. When a Federal steamer was reportedly driven aground near Fort Macon in early January, Company B, along with other troops, was sent to capture its crew and the 300 troops reported to be on board. Upon arrival, “they saw it was an English vessel, so they were sadly disappointed.”<sup>61</sup> This false alarm, coincidental with the knowledge that many of the men’s terms of enlistment were due to expire in a few months time, caused many to despair of ever seeing action. Unknown to the men of the regiment, a new Federal effort to conquer the coast of North Carolina was in the planning and would soon give them the chance they hoped for.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

<sup>61</sup> David Thompson, Fort Macon, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, January 9, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>62</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

## Chapter 2—January-May, 1862

**“Our regiment was not much engaged but the shells fell thick and fast around us, bursting above us and all around us. It was terrible but our men stood it nobly.”**

**- Third Lieutenant James Graham, Company G<sup>63</sup>**

In late 1861, Federal war planners began looking into the possibility of invading and capturing the coastal sections of North Carolina, including the cities Beaufort and New Bern. With the Union victory at Hatteras Inlet in August, Federal land and naval forces already controlled vast stretches of the Outer Banks. Now, with the belief that Unionist sentiment in eastern North Carolina was widespread, an idea that had been propagated by loyal citizens of the islands who had more contact with the North than with the Confederacy, leaders in Washington wanted to expand their hold on the coastal section. Another goal of the eventual expedition was to divert Confederate forces from Virginia, where the main Federal effort in 1862, led by Major General George McClellan, would be launched against the Southern capital at Richmond. In preparation for the expedition, Brigadier General Ambrose Burnside was assigned as its commander and numerous regiments and military vessels were assembled in Annapolis, Maryland. By the first week of January 1862, Burnside had more than 15,000 men, twenty-six navy and army gunboats, and nearly eighty transports in his so-called “Coast Division.” After boarding their assigned transports, the regiments of the expedition, most of whom hailed from New England, set sail on January 9. After a brief stop at Fortress Monroe at the tip

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<sup>63</sup> Wagstaff, 117.

of the Virginia Peninsula, the force was on its way once again. Their destination was Hatteras Inlet and the entrance to Pamlico Sound.<sup>64</sup>

Meanwhile, at Camp Gatlin and Fort Macon, the routine of camp and garrison life continued for the men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina. As the cold of winter intensified, the seven companies at Camp Gatlin began constructing log huts to ward off the weather. The newly appointed regimental adjutant, Third Lieutenant James Graham, described the conditions at the camp: "We are about 2 1/2 miles from Newbern on the banks of the Neuse River living in log houses. My house is not done yet...I hope to be able to get into it in a few days. It has been raining now for two days and is very wet and muddy."<sup>65</sup> At Fort Macon, meanwhile, Private David Thompson of Company G described life in the shanties outside of the fort: "it's [so] cold that I can't hardly hold my pen and the house is crowded."<sup>66</sup> Despite the cold and dreary weather, the soldiers continued their drill and fatigue work and learned through rumors of Burnside's expedition and its probable goals. Lieutenant Graham, being close to Colonel Sloan and more official information, wrote on January 18, "There is a good deal of talk here of Burnside's expedition attacking this place, but nobody seems to know where it is going. We heard yesterday that it was at Hatteras."<sup>67</sup> Private Thompson, on February 2, wrote of a rumor that the enemy fleet had been wrecked by a storm, "we got nuse last night that a good portion of the fleet was destroyed by the storm, I am in hopes that it is so, that will

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<sup>64</sup> Richard A. Sauers, "*A Succession of Honorable Victories:*" *The Burnside Expedition in North Carolina*, (Dayton, OH: Morningside House, Inc., 1996), 24-27, 39-49, 107-120.

<sup>65</sup> Wagstaff, 111.

<sup>66</sup> David Thompson, Fort Macon, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, February 2, 1862, Samuel Thompson Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>67</sup> Wagstaff, 110.

be that many less for them to fight at Newbern, Washington, and Roanoke Island.”<sup>68</sup>

Other soldiers, such as Private Leander Hunt of Company B, tired of garrison life at Fort Macon, hoped for a fight: “We heard to day they had quite a number of boats in the sound and that they were destined for New Berne and this place. If you would see our men at work you would think we were going to have a fight tonight but I don’t think we will be attacked soon but it is well enough to be ready.”<sup>69</sup>

In reality, Burnside’s expedition, although scattered by a pair of severe storms off Cape Hatteras in mid January, had regrouped and was ready to attack its first target, Roanoke Island, by the first week in February. Under the cover of the expedition’s gunboats, Burnside’s troops went ashore on February 7 and quickly located the main Confederate defensive line. The Southerners on the island, numbering barely 2,500 men and commanded by Colonel Henry M. Shaw of the of the Eighth North Carolina, put up a brave defense but were ultimately overrun by superior Union numbers and forced to capitulate the next day. With the capture of Roanoke Island, and the subsequent destruction of Confederate Commodore Lynch’s improvised gunboats of the “Mosquito Fleet,” the way was now clear for the Federals to move on New Bern and Fort Macon.<sup>70</sup> At the fort meanwhile, Private Thompson wrote of the rumors then circulating about the battle, “I recon they are fighting at Roanoke island by this time, we herd last night or

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<sup>68</sup> David Thompson, Fort Macon, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, February 2, 1862, Samuel Thompson Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>69</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Fort Macon, North Carolina, to M.A. Conrad, Clemmonsville, North Carolina, January 20, 1862, Bryan Grimes Collection, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

<sup>70</sup> Sauer, *Burnside Expedition*, 122-146, 165-204; Francis H. Kennedy, ed., *The Civil War Battlefield Guide, Second Edition*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1998), 60.

night before last that the fleet had gon there.”<sup>71</sup> Once the truth became known, it naturally depressed the troops, but there was a feeling that the garrison had done its best and that it would soon most likely be their turn. Adjutant Graham wrote, “We can get no particulars of the Roanoke Island fight, as to who was killed or wounded...our men certainly did fight well and bravely.”<sup>72</sup>

In New Bern, Brigadier General Lawrence O’ Bryan Branch, the new commander of the District of the Pamlico, took steps to ready his command, including the Twenty-Seventh, for the probable Union attack. In addition to the seven companies of the Twenty-Seventh then at Camp Gatlin, Branch quickly concentrated the Thirty-Fifth and Thirty-Seventh North Carolina regiments as well as six companies of the Second North Carolina Cavalry in and around New Bern. Branch also ordered Companies A, B, and G of the Twenty-Seventh, as well as the whole of the Twenty-Sixth, still at or near Fort Macon, to move to New Bern as soon as possible. These preparations were complete by the end of February. Additional troops from the Seventh and Thirty-Third North Carolina would arrive from Newport and Raleigh, respectively, in the coming week to strengthen Branch’s forces, which also included eight batteries of artillery deployed in the various batteries and forts along the Neuse River, many of which the men of the Twenty-Seventh had most likely helped to construct.<sup>73</sup>

On February 28, Companies A, B, and G left Fort Macon and headed for New Bern, to the great dismay of Colonel White, who was now left with only five companies

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<sup>71</sup> David Thompson, Fort Macon, North Carolina to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, February 8, 1862, Samuel Thompson Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>72</sup> Wagstaff, 114.

<sup>73</sup> Sauers, 229-30, 488; Branch, 123.

of heavy artillerymen to garrison the fort. Newly elected Second Lieutenant John Sloan of Company B described the movement: "About mid-day we filed through the sally-port and bade a long and sad farewell to Fort Macon. We were transported by boat to Morehead City, and thence by rail to Newberne. We arrived at Fort Lane late in the evening, and in the pouring rain, marched to our quarters."<sup>74</sup> Private Thompson of Company G also described the arrival near Fort Lane: "We went into some cloth tents which they had put up for us; before day a hard wind bley every tent over. I happened to get into a little pole cabin whare I lodged untill light. We have been fixing up since."<sup>75</sup> Despite the mention of log huts, the majority of the three newly arrived companies apparently remained encamped in tents. Lieutenant Graham stated: "Our men are living in tents, but seem to like this place better than Fort Macon. As it is so near warm weather I think that they will not build winter quarters; for we do not know where we may be sent to as soon as spring opens."<sup>76</sup> With the regiment finally united into a single command, the Twenty-Seventh prepared for action against Burnside's expected attack.

One problem confronting the regiment, as well as the rest of Branch's command, however, was the absence of numerous officers who were presently at home recruiting new men for their regiments and companies. With the one-year enlistments of many units due to expire in a few months, the Confederate government attempted to get its soldiers to re-enlist for three-year terms. Private Thompson related that, at least in Orange County, new recruits were beginning to join up: "I was surprised to here of so

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<sup>74</sup> Sloan, 28.

<sup>75</sup> David Thompson, Fort Lane, North Carolina, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, February 28, 1862, Samuel Thompson Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>76</sup> Wagstaff, 116-17.

many volunteering.”<sup>77</sup> Despite an influx of new volunteers into some of the companies, most soldiers who had been in service since mid 1861 were generally loath to re-enlist. In terms of regimental leadership, Colonel John Sloan and Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Singletary were both absent, possibly recruiting for the regiment. As the Twenty-Seventh neared entering its first engagement, Major John A. Gilmer remained in command of the regiment, which, beset by sickness, as well as numerous discharges and transfers, most likely numbered between 500 and 600 men, armed with a variety of rifled and smoothbore muskets.<sup>78</sup>

The Confederate defenses outside of New Bern included two main lines of entrenchments, which covered both the North Carolina and Atlantic Railroad and the Beaufort Road. The first line, known as the “Croatan Line,” was located along Otter Creek, perhaps twelve miles south of New Bern. Despite its strong natural position, the line could be easily flanked by Union gunboats and transports and so was abandoned in favor of the Fort Thompson line. This line of earthworks, named for the fortification which anchored its left flank on the Neuse River, was about six miles south of New Bern and consisted of an earth and log breastwork with a six foot deep ditch fronting the enemy. The line, which had been partially constructed by the men of the Twenty-Seventh during D.H. Hill’s tenure as commander of the district, ran for nearly a mile from the river to the railroad and, under Branch’s orders, had been improved by the addition of an abatis of sharpened branches as well as the clearing of over 300 yards of

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<sup>77</sup> David Thompson, Fort Lane, North Carolina, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, February 28, 1862, Samuel Thompson Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>78</sup> Sauer, 246-47, 488.

open killing ground. West of the railroad, several redans were constructed to lengthen the line all the way to Brice's Creek, which provided a firm anchor for the right flank. In addition, to further protect the city from Union gunboats, several water batteries were erected along the river between Fort Thompson and New Bern. To hold this relatively strong position, Branch had around 4,000 men of all arms and about thirty heavy guns.<sup>79</sup>

Burnside, utilizing his numerous transports, embarked most of his troops from Roanoke Island on March 11 and, supported by naval gunboats, entered the Neuse River. On March 13, nearly 11,000 Union troops landed at the mouth of Slocum's Creek near the "Croatan Line" and began advancing north towards the Confederate pickets, who quickly fell back towards the Fort Thompson line. According to Brigadier General Branch, "The Fort Thompson breastwork now became my sole reliance for resisting his advance, and throughout the remainder of the day and night of Thursday [March 13] the most active efforts were made to strengthen that work. Both officers and men executed my orders with unflagging energy."<sup>80</sup> On the afternoon of the thirteenth, the Twenty-Seventh, now preparing for its very first engagement, took its place in the earthworks on the extreme left end of the line next to Fort Thompson; the Thirty-Seventh North Carolina filed in on their right. Lieutenant Sloan described the positioning of the regiment: "we left our quarters and moved down the south bank of the Neuse a short distance, where we were placed in line of battle, in entrenchments which had previously been constructed...our regiment being the extreme left of the lines, and resting upon the

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 249-53.

<sup>80</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 9, 243.

river.”<sup>81</sup> According to Major Gilmer, “The regiment remained (covering the breastworks, principally in one rank, for the distance of 300 or 400 yards from Fort Thompson) all the day and night of the 13<sup>th</sup>.”<sup>82</sup> As the men took their positions, the weather worsened and made life generally miserable. Private Robert Howell of Company A, recently returned to the unit from a temporary assignment as paymaster, complained, “It rained all the time and the trenches were very muddy.”<sup>83</sup> Meanwhile, Burnside’s troops, camped several miles south along the Beaufort Road, also contended with the rain and prepared to launch their attack early the next morning.<sup>84</sup>

By the morning of the fourteenth, a dense fog had replaced the heavy rain of the night before. Soldiers on both sides had to contend with weapons rendered temporarily unserviceable due to the extreme dampness. According to Lieutenant Sloan, “The morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> broke raw and cold, the fog was so dense that we could not see fifty yards beyond our works.”<sup>85</sup> In the ranks of the regiment, twenty-seven men from Companies D, C, E, F and H, whom had previously been drilled in light artillery, were detailed to help serve the guns of Latham’s Battery, which took position to the right of the Twenty-Seventh.<sup>86</sup> Sometime after dawn, Major Gilmer “was informed by Captain Barden, whose company [A] had been sent out the evening before as a portion of the picket guard, that the enemy was advancing on the county [Beaufort] road to our right.

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<sup>81</sup> Sloan, 28.

<sup>82</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 9, 257*.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Phillips Howell, “Robert Howell Memoirs,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 7.

<sup>84</sup> Kennedy, *Battlefield Guide*, 60-61; Sauer, 257-60.

<sup>85</sup> Sloan, 28.

<sup>86</sup> Clark, 427.

About 6:30 or 7 a.m. the fire of the enemy began beyond our right.”<sup>87</sup> As the Federals pushed forward in the center, only the Twenty-Fifth Massachusetts of Brigadier General John G. Foster’s Brigade positioned itself in front of the Twenty-Seventh. With the enemy concealed by the mist and remaining several hundred yards from the works, Colonel Charles Lee, commanding the Confederate left wing reported, “The men of the Twenty-Seventh and Thirty-Seventh Regiments did not fire a shot except a few who were armed with long range rifles, and this ominous silence was properly appreciated.”<sup>88</sup>

Despite the lack of enemy activity to their front, Major Gilmer’s command did have to contend with the fire of the Union gunboats in the Neuse River whose fire tended to overshoot the guns of Fort Thompson and land along the breastworks. Lieutenant Graham described the bombardment: “Our regiment was not much engaged but the shells fell thick and fast around us, bursting above us and all around us. It was terrible but our men stood it nobly.”<sup>89</sup> Major Gilmer also commented on the coolness of the men in this, their first experience under fire, “the regiment manfully and cheerfully sustained the shower of shell and shot from the gunboats for two and half hours, during which but 1 man was killed and 3 stunned.”<sup>90</sup> Through his cool demeanor, Gilmer helped keep his men in place. According to Colonel Lee, “Major Gilmer, of the Twenty-seventh, and Lieutenant-Colonel Barbour of the Thirty-Seventh, moved from place to place within the

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<sup>87</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 9, 257-58.

<sup>88</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 9, 264; Sauers, 261-68.

<sup>89</sup> Wagstaff, 117.

<sup>90</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 9, 258.

limits of their respective commands, and, by their presence, and example encouraged their commands very much.”<sup>91</sup>

While the regiment endured the shelling of the gunboats and traded sporadic musket fire with the Twenty-Fifth Massachusetts, the tide of battle swung decidedly in favor of the Federals. After breaching the center of the Confederate line, which was located along the railroad at Wood’s Brickyard and manned by a battalion of North Carolina militia, the Federals fought off Branch’s attempts to regain the position and threatened to roll up the entire Confederate line. In summing up his regiment’s response to this breakthrough, Major Gilmer reported:

Between 10 and 11 a.m. I discovered that the troops stationed immediately on the right of the Twenty-seventh were falling back, which movement I discovered was being followed by two or three companies of the Twenty-seventh, on the right. I immediately hastened to my right and ordered the two retreating companies back to the trenches. I then gave my entire command the order to fire by file, designating at the same time the direction in which I perceived the enemy advancing in great numbers.<sup>92</sup>

Despite this resistance, the regiment, and the whole army, was quickly ordered to fall back by General Branch. Almost simultaneously to this order, the Twenty-Fourth Massachusetts, which had replaced the Twenty-Fifth in front of Gilmer’s position, advanced through the abatis and surged toward the breastworks. According to Private David Thompson of Company G, “they did not come close enough for us to fire on until about fifteen minutes before we retreated, we then fired about three or four rounds at

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 258.

them when the command was given to retreat.”<sup>93</sup> After firing a final volley into the advancing enemy, the regiment retreated back towards Camp Gatlin and New Bern to avoid being surrounded. The men who had been detailed to help man the guns of Latham’s battery, many of whom had been killed or wounded, had already been driven from the field and their guns captured.<sup>94</sup>

As the Twenty-Seventh fell back, there are conflicting accounts as to the condition and discipline of the regiment. Major Gilmer wrote in his report of the battle that, “I ordered the regiment to retire, which was done in tolerable order by most of the companies on the left. I ordered those companies which were together to march to the railroad bridge, where the greater part of the right assembled and halted.”<sup>95</sup> Lieutenant Graham, on the other hand, told a different story: “We were ordered to retreat and such a mess I never saw. I endeavored to get our men together, but every man was looking out for himself.”<sup>96</sup> Private Leander Hunt of Company B, who was captured during the retreat, continued this vein: “We all had to run like the mischief to keep from being taken by the enemy.”<sup>97</sup> Robert Howell of Company A likewise commented, “We were greatly outnumbered and driven back to New Bern. The only command we had was to “Retreat,” when every man started to run.”<sup>98</sup> As they ran for the railroad bridge over the

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<sup>93</sup> David Thompson, Kinston, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, March 17, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>94</sup> Sauer, 270-86.

<sup>95</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 9, 258.

<sup>96</sup> Wagstaff, 117-18.

<sup>97</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Camp South West, North Carolina, to M.A. Conrad, Clemmonsville, North Carolina, April 10, 1862, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

<sup>98</sup> Robert Phillips Howell, “Robert Howell Memoirs,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 8.

Trent River, the men of the regiment abandoned their old camps and were forced to leave almost all of their tents and baggage behind.

Upon their hurried arrival in New Bern, the Confederates quickly realized that they could not hold the city against the pursuing Federals or the enemy gunboats, which were then steaming past the now abandoned water batteries. Seeing that his army would be trapped if they remained long, General Branch ordered the evacuation of the city and the consolidation of the army at Kinston. Following their passage of the Trent, the men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina continued their retreat through the city. Major Gilmer stated: "I passed with them over the bridge to the railroad depot, where the companies were again formed. At the depot we were ordered to fall back still further, when I placed the regiment on the march toward Kinston." After reaching the junction of the county road and the railroad outside of town, the regiment "proceeded to Kinston, partly on foot and partly by means of the cars which were sent to take us up."<sup>99</sup>

Lieutenant Sloan remembered the retreat of Company B in much the same way: "The company, or at least a portion of it, reformed at the depot in Newberne. From here we continued our retreat unmolested to Kinston, where we arrived at an hour late in the night."<sup>100</sup>

Once again, several soldiers contradicted this picture of an orderly retreat. David Thompson stated that the trains were reserved for the sick and wounded while "we walked every step of the way here 38 miles, by day light saturday morning we were

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<sup>99</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 9, 258.

<sup>100</sup> Sloan, 30; Sauers, 294-99.

perfectly broken down.”<sup>101</sup> Lieutenant Graham in particular described a very messy situation: “I retreated with the regiment for four or five miles when the alarm was given that the enemy were upon us. We then scattered through the woods and every man took care of himself. I waded several creeks and ditches about waist deep and at last came up with some of our cavalry and rode behind them to this place.”<sup>102</sup> Despite the confusion and disorder that infected many companies, Major Gilmer still believed the men had done the best they could: “The promptness and cheerfulness with which the officers [and men] under my command obeyed every order and the courage with which they took and maintained every position assigned them I cannot too favorably notice.”<sup>103</sup>

By dawn of March 15, most of the regiment was concentrated in and around Kinston. Exceptions to this concentration included the whole of Company I, which reportedly followed Captain William Ward back to Jones County, as well as all but thirty men of Company K who kept on marching all the way to Goldsboro. Both groups would ultimately return to camp in a few days time.<sup>104</sup> As stragglers continued to arrive, the men of the Twenty-Seventh and the other regiments of the army began to take stock of what had been lost. In return for inflicting 476 casualties on the victorious Federals, Confederate casualties numbered around 600, but most of these were only missing. Some were captured but many would turn up in Kinston in the days and weeks to come. More seriously, sixty-eight men were killed and 116 wounded; the army also lost almost

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<sup>101</sup> David Thompson, Kinston, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, March 17, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>102</sup> Wagstaff, 118.

<sup>103</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 9, 259.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

all of its artillery. The Twenty-Seventh, being only slightly engaged during much of the battle, suffered relatively few casualties. Major Gilmer reported that the regiment lost four killed, eight wounded and forty-two missing, sixteen of which were captured.<sup>105</sup> This total must include the losses among the twenty-seven men who helped serve the guns of Latham's battery. Lieutenant Graham, who as acting adjutant had detailed the soldiers to the battery, acknowledged, "that about two-thirds of these artillerists were killed or wounded."<sup>106</sup> In addition to the casualties suffered, the men of the regiment also lived with the knowledge that they had lost almost all of their personal possessions as well as their tents, which were left behind at Camp Gatlin during the hurried retreat. Private Thompson related that "I hadn't nothing but what I had on (my uniform), I held on to my gun,"<sup>107</sup> while Lieutenant Graham of the same company lost "everything I had except my uniform that I have got on and my overcoat."<sup>108</sup>

After consolidating near Kinston, the men of the regiment began laying blame for the defeat and the loss of New Bern. Private Hunt of Company B believed "if we had only had a few more thousand men we would have had New Berne today our Gens are to blame. I believe Branch done all he could but I am satisfied Gen. Gatlin done nothing."<sup>109</sup> Private Thompson also believed some general officer was to blame: "I

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<sup>105</sup> Sauer, 297-304; U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 9, 247.

<sup>106</sup> Clark, 427.

<sup>107</sup> David Thompson, Kinston, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, March 19, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>108</sup> Wagstaff, 118.

<sup>109</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Camp Southwest, North Carolina, to M.A. Conrad, Clemmons, North Carolina, April 10, 1862, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

believe that if our Generals had been any account we would have whipped them.”<sup>110</sup> The men also exaggerated the size of the enemy force as well as the casualties inflicted upon it. Statements like “there were 35,000 land forces besides their gunboats” and “I heard a day or two ago that we killed and wounded 4700 of them” were common in letters being sent home at this time.<sup>111</sup> On March 15, in reaction to the outcry over the fall of New Bern, General Theophilus Holmes replaced Richard Gatlin as commander of the Department of North Carolina. Three days later, the Twenty-Seventh was placed in a new brigade commanded by Brigadier General Samuel G. French, which also included the Seventh, Twenty-Sixth, and Thirty-Fifth North Carolina regiments. Under the leadership of Holmes and French, the men of the department drilled, carried out picket duty, established new camps, and generally recovered from their defeat at New Bern.<sup>112</sup>

During this time, the men of the regiment made do without tents, blankets, or extra clothes, although deliveries from home soon alleviated much of the hardship suffered by the troops. While waiting for new tents to be delivered, some of the officers and men apparently found accommodation in the homes and churches of Kinston. Lieutenant Graham mentioned that he was currently “sleeping on the floor with a carpet bag for a pillow,” while Private Thompson told his mother, “I have slept in a private

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<sup>110</sup> David Thompson, Kinston, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, March 19, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>111</sup> David Thompson, Kinston, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, March 17, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 121.

<sup>112</sup> William R. Trotter, *Ironclads and Columbiads: The Civil War in North Carolina: The Coast*, (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, Publisher, 1989), 122-25; Jordan and Manarin, 1-2.

house ever since I have been here, the company [G] stays in the Baptist Church.”<sup>113</sup> With two of the regiments companies comprised of men from Lenoir County, and many more from the surrounding region, the citizens of Kinston apparently opened their doors and larders to the soldiers of the Twenty-Seventh and most likely the men of the other regiments as well.

On March 22, French’s Brigade moved to Camp Blackjack located about eight miles west of Kinston. Their stay there was short as the men were soon moved to Camp South West, about five miles east of Kinston, on or about March 29. Private John K. Clark of Company G described their new camp: “We are four miles below Kinston, at an old church, and in the old church.”<sup>114</sup> Sometime during this week, the regiment was issued new tents. Private Thompson remembered, “We moved again yesterday to this place we have pitched our tents here, but I don’t know how long we will stay here.” The men, or at least some of them, were also issued additional clothing to make up for that lost at Camp Gatlin. Lieutenant Graham mentioned “the Quarter Master had supplied our men or would supply them with clothing in a day or two.” On March 28, the Twenty-Seventh “had a new flag presented to our regiment by the ladies of Kinston...the flag cost \$105.00.”<sup>115</sup> It is unclear what type of flag this was. Perhaps it was a North Carolina state flag and something had happened to the original banner carried by the regiment.

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<sup>113</sup> Wagstaff, 119; David Thompson, Kinston, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, March 19, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>114</sup> John K. Clark, Camp South West, North Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, March 31, 1862, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>115</sup> Wagstaff, 119; David Thompson, Kinston, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, March 29, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Perhaps it was captured during the retreat from New Bern. It is possible that the new flag was a Confederate national flag, otherwise known as the “stars and bars.” Overall, the men seemed to enjoy life at Camp South West during this time. The consummate letter writer David Thompson mentioned, “We have a splendid place to camp...we haven’t got very good water [but] we get plenty of shad to eat by paying \$1.00 a piece for them.”<sup>116</sup> Lieutenant Graham wrote that the men were able to attend church services: “We had two sermons yesterday by Mr. Faucett a Presbyterian preacher from Oxford.”<sup>117</sup>

Repetitions of drill and picket duty “on the roads leading to Newberne” remained the main occupation of the regiment, as well as the rest of the troops stationed around Kinston, for the better part of March and April. To keep an eye on the Federals in and around New Bern and prevent any surprise attack on Kinston, General Holmes utilized picket details from the infantry and cavalry, which remained on duty for days at time. The Twenty-Seventh participated in these patrols by rotating companies between camp and picket. John Clark mentioned, “we expect to go out on picket in a day or two, and will be gone three days” while David Thompson wrote, “our company has to go on picket duty tomorrow we will stay a day and night we go about 6 or 7 miles below here.”<sup>118</sup> By late April, the Confederate and Federal pickets were in very close quarters. Private Thompson described one patrol towards New Bern in which Company G participated: “We have been all in amongst the yankees, we are today taking a rest at a house where

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Wagstaff, 120; Jordan and Manarin, 2.

<sup>118</sup> Sloan, 30; John K. Clark, Camp South West, North Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, March 31, 1862, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; David Thompson, Camp South West, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, April 9, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

our lowest pickets are posted; we haven't had any skirmish with them though they have been in 50 yards of us but was too many of them for us to manage them so we let them slide."<sup>119</sup>

Despite efforts by the state and Confederate governments, as well as individual regimental and company officers, to get their soldiers to re-enlist for three years or the duration of the war, apparently few men from the Twenty-Seventh did so. John Clark of Company G mentioned in a letter home "There was only six of our boys re-enlisted for the war," while many other soldiers talked of going home when their terms expired; "Our company will be out on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April I understand and hope to be at home at that time."<sup>120</sup> At the same time, however, numerous letters spoke of wishing to engage the enemy once more before their time expired and thereby possibly erase the burden of defeat experienced at New Bern. Private Hunt of Company B wrote, "I wish I could get into another fight before my time is out I want to whip the rascals next time I never want to run again."<sup>121</sup> Lieutenant Graham of Company G confirmed this feeling: "I want to see the Yankees once more before that time and run them and see if it won't feel better to run after them than to have them running after us."<sup>122</sup> Despite the men's desire for action, other than occasional flare-ups between the rival picket lines, large-scale troop

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<sup>119</sup> David Thompson, "near Yankeydom," North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, April 27, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Trotter, *Ironclads and Columbiads*, 160.

<sup>120</sup> John K. Clark, Camp South West, North Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, March 31, 1862, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Wagstaff, 120.

<sup>121</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Camp South West, North Carolina, to M.A. Conrad, Clemmonsville, North Carolina, April 10, 1862, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

<sup>122</sup> Wagstaff, 120-21.

movements and engagements were almost non-existent in the Kinston area during this time. Perhaps anticipating the need for the upcoming extension of their terms of service, Private Thompson wrote in early April, “it looks sorta bad for us to come home when the enemy is so close on us.”<sup>123</sup> John Clark of the same company echoed this sentiment: “It looks like a shame for us to go home at a time when we are so badly needed.”<sup>124</sup>

Unknown to most of the men in the ranks, the Confederate Congress, realizing that the expiration of so many one year enlistments would deal a crippling blow to the prospects of Southern independence, passed the Conscription Act on April 16, 1862. Under its terms, “President Davis was authorized to call out and place in military service for three years all white male residents between the ages of 18 and 35 years, and to continue those already in the field until three years from the date of enlistment, but those under 18 and over 35 were to remain 90 days [before being discharged]”<sup>125</sup> Regiments already in service, such as the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, were to be re-organized as three-year regiments and hold new elections for regimental and company level officers and non-commissioned officers. These elections began in the days following the passing of the conscription legislation and resulted in numerous changes within the regiment.<sup>126</sup> Despite the forced extension of their terms of enlistment, few soldiers in the regiment seemed all that upset by the act. Instead they treated it more as a necessity and as a

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<sup>123</sup> David Thompson, Camp South West, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, April 9, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>124</sup> John K. Clark, Camp South West, North Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, March 31, 1862, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>125</sup> Sloan, 31-32.

<sup>126</sup> Clark, 427; Jordan and Manarin, 2.

matter of fact. In a letter to his mother two weeks after conscription began, Private Thompson of Company G wrote while on picket, “Our company has reorganized I suppose since I left the camp, but I don’t know who they elected for Officers...how is the conscription law serving all the folks up there [?]”<sup>127</sup> Due in part to conscription, the regiment received many new recruits during the first several months of 1862, many of whom may have volunteered knowing they were about to be drafted.<sup>128</sup> The proximity of the enemy, the hope of getting revenge for their defeat at New Bern, as well as the opportunity of remaining in their original regiments and the chance to elect new officers may all have contributed to the decision many of the original volunteers made to accept the re-organization.

The most important change in command at the regimental level was the election of a new colonel for the Twenty-Seventh. John Rogers Cooke, a twenty-nine year old Missouri born Virginian and former U.S. Army officer, son of Union General Phillip St. George Cooke and brother in law of Confederate General J.E.B. Stuart, was elected colonel of the regiment, replacing John Sloan. Prior to this election, and after the secession of Virginia, Cooke had joined the Confederate army and served on General Holmes’ staff as Chief of Artillery for the Department of North Carolina. That billet must have resulted in his familiarity with the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh and their acquaintance with him. Lieutenant Colonel Richard W. Singletary, who had been elected to this position after his brother Thomas resigned to follow George Singletary

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<sup>127</sup> David Thompson, “near Yankeydom,” North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, April 27, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>128</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 11-98.

into the Forty-Fourth North Carolina, was re-elected. So was Major John Gilmer. During the next month, other changes were made including the appointment of Dr. Hector Turner of Moore County as surgeon of the regiment, following the resignation of William Blow. William Wilson, formerly third lieutenant of Company B, was promoted to the position of regimental adjutant.<sup>129</sup>

Within the individual companies, numerous changes were also made as many officers and non-commissioned officers were voted out of office and new men chosen to fill their positions. In most cases the defeated officers were so disgraced that they immediately resigned. Enlisted men had no such opportunity; their resignation would have relegated them to the rank of private.<sup>130</sup> In Company A, Second Lieutenant James D. Bryan replaced Stephen Phillips as captain. The men of Company B re-elected William Adams who had commanded the company since October. In Company C, George Whitfield maintained his position while Company D's Captain William Wooten, who had died of disease in February, was replaced by Second Lieutenant Calvin Herring. In Company E, Jason P. Joyner, who had previously served as adjutant of the regiment, was re-elected to command the company. The men of Company F voted Captain William Nixon out of office and replaced him with Second Lieutenant Thomas D. Jones. Joseph Webb maintained his position as captain of Company G, while in Company H, Joseph Williams, who had replaced Richard Singletary after his election to lieutenant colonel, was re-elected captain. Sergeant William R. Larkins of Company I made the

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<sup>129</sup> Clark, 427-28; Jordan and Manarin, 7-8; Flora Stuart [John R. Cooke's sister], to [unknown recipient], May 12, 1891, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>130</sup> As a re-telling of every command change would be too time consuming, the author will simply cover the changes made in terms of who captained each company.

largest leap in rank when the men elected him captain, thereby replacing William Ward. Finally, in Company K, First Sergeant James M. Gardner was elected to replace Captain Benjamin Barden.<sup>131</sup> These changes in command necessitated other elections and shifts that thoroughly altered the command structure of almost every company in the regiment.

Another change made in mid to late April was the transfer of the Twenty-Seventh from French's Brigade to the command of Brigadier General Robert Ransom. Ransom's Brigade also included the Twenty-Fifth, Twenty-Sixth, and Thirty-Fifth North Carolina regiments. The soldiers in the ranks soon commented upon their new colonel and brigade commander. Private Robert Howell of Company A described Colonel Cooke as "an old officer and strict disciplinarian," while Private Samuel P. Lockhart, a new recruit in Company G wrote, "We have a fine little man for our Colonel, his name is Cook; the Lieut. Col. is named Singletary; he is a very fine man also." Private Thompson denounced General Ransom and praised Colonel Cooke in the same letter: "Old Ransom wouldn't care if half of his men was to die...Cooke is a man that aint going to see his men imposed upon...every man in the regiment likes him. I expected when he was elected that he would be a tyrannical sort of man as most of the old United States officers are [but] he is the same to a private as he is to an officer."<sup>132</sup> Apparently, one reason why the men disliked Ransom concerned the movement of the brigade to a new camp

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<sup>131</sup> Sloan, 32; Robert Phillips Howell, "Robert Howell Memoirs," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 9; Jordan and Manarin, 11-98.

<sup>132</sup> Robert Phillips Howell, "Robert Howell Memoirs," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 9; Samuel P. Lockhart, Kinston, North Carolina, to Emeline Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, May 11, 1862, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; David Thompson, Kinston, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, May 14, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

sometime in mid May. Unlike their previous camp along Southwest Creek, the new location was “near Kinston in a large old field without a single tree for shade and [we] have to take the sun in all its force and indeed it is very hot in the middle of the day.”<sup>133</sup> Private Thompson explained, “we haven’t got a very good place to camp...Col. Cook had gon off when we moved in we would never have been in such a place, he says that he intends to move to a better place in a day or two...Ransom was the cause of us coming here.”<sup>134</sup> It does not appear that Cooke was able to transfer the regiment to another campsite during the remainder of their stay in the Kinston area.

Despite complaints about their camp and General Ransom, the men of the Twenty-Seventh were kept relatively busy during May. Continued drill, picket duty, and helping to destroy sections of the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad were the main occupations of the regiment during this time. Private John Clark, who was suffering from an unknown sickness, mentioned in a letter home, “I will be able to drill in a day or two.”<sup>135</sup> Lieutenant Graham wrote of the regiment’s continued participation in picket duty and roving patrols: “I was away from camp all last week about 16 miles below here...we had a fine time last week sleeping on the ground at night without any tent.”<sup>136</sup> In order to keep Burnside’s Federals penned up in New Bern as much as possible and prevent them from using the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad in the future, General

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<sup>133</sup> Wagstaff, 121.

<sup>134</sup> David Thompson, Kinston, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, May 14, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>135</sup> John K. Clark, Kinston, North Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, May 15, 1862, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>136</sup> Wagstaff, 121.

Holmes ordered the destruction of large stretches of the railroad between Kinston and the Union lines. The Twenty-Seventh helped with this demolition project. Private Lockhart of Company G reported, “Some of our soldiers have been down the railroad and tore it up as they came back,” while Company B’s newly elected first lieutenant, John A. Sloan commented on the operation in more detail: “From the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> of May, we assisted in tearing up and destroying the railroad from Kinston to Core Creek. We made up our minds if Burnside pursued us again, he should come more slowly, and on foot.”<sup>137</sup>

The observations of Private Samuel Lockhart provide a look into some of the problems affecting the men of the regiment, despite Colonel Cooke’s attempts to maintain discipline, during their stay in the Kinston area. Having just joined his company a week earlier, Lockhart, obviously a deeply religious and conservative young man, was shocked by the behavior of some of the men in the Twenty-Seventh. In a letter to his mother he wrote, “I have heard more cursing and swearing since I left home than I ever heard in my life before. Sometimes they get hold of liquor and they get drunk and rip and dance and curse...Boys that you would think are pious are playing cards every day.” Apparently some of the officers in the regiment were not above this type of behavior either: “I don’t reckon there is a half dozen pious officers in the Regiment. One of our officers went to town, got drunk and fell off [his horse] and the horse ran over him and knocked him senseless for a while.” The use of liquor was bad enough that the Provost Guard “got three or four of our fellows in jail now for running about through the town

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<sup>137</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Kinston, North Carolina, to Emeline Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, May 11, 1862, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Sloan, 38.

and getting drunk.”<sup>138</sup> Given Colonel Cooke’s penchant for discipline and orderliness, it would be interesting to see what the behavior of the regiment was like before his taking command. Despite these remarks, there is no evidence that the behavior of some of the men in the regiment was any worse than that displayed by other soldiers in the Confederate Army as a whole.

On May 19, Private Leander Hunt, only recently exchanged after being captured at New Bern, wrote, “There is much anxiety felt about Richmond some think that the yankees will take it...I would not be surprised if we were moved to Va soon.”<sup>139</sup> Hunt would be proven correct in less than two weeks time. Ever since the beginning of Union General McClellan’s “Peninsula Campaign,” the Confederate government had been concerned about the safety of the capital. By late May, Federal forces were closing in on Richmond and threatening to lay siege to the city unless the Confederate forces defending it, under the command of General Joseph Johnston, could defeat them. Getting reinforcements from every available quarter, Richmond quickly turned its eye to the Department of North Carolina, where Burnside’s forces seemed to be doing nothing that would warrant the retaining of thousands of Confederate troops in the Kinston area when the Confederate capital was in danger. In late May, General Holmes was ordered to

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<sup>138</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Kinston, North Carolina, to Emeline Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, May 11, 1862, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>139</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Kinston, North Carolina, to M.A. Conrad, Clemmonsville, North Carolina, May 19, 1862, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

begin moving his troops to Virginia by way of the railroads. One of the first contingents to be sent north was Ransom's Brigade.<sup>140</sup>

Private Thompson related that on the morning of May 30, "we had orders last night to cook rations of meat...we certainly will leave here this morning but I don't know where are going."<sup>141</sup> The rations that he spoke of, included, according to Private Lockhart, "cornbread and rye coffee [and] meat [that is] rotten, a part of it, and what is not rotten is so strong."<sup>142</sup> Despite the poor rations, Lieutenant Sloan remembered, "On the 31<sup>st</sup> of May we folded our tents, made our preparations for a hasty adieu to North Carolina and left Kinston for the seat of war in Virginia."<sup>143</sup> Riding the cars the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad to Goldsboro and then the Wilmington and Weldon to Petersburg, Virginia, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, many of whom had most likely never left the state before, were now on their way to help defend the capital of the Confederate States of America.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Douglass Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenant: A Study in Command, Abridged Edition*, (Old Saybrook, CT: Koneky and Koneky, 1998), 148; Barrett, 128; Trotter, 151-52.

<sup>141</sup> David Thompson, Kinston, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, May 30, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>142</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Kinston, North Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, May 17, 1862, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>143</sup> Sloan, 34.

<sup>144</sup> Clark, 428.



### Chapter 3—June-August, 1862

**“We never got into any fight but I would rather have fought a battle than have done the marching that we done.” - Private David Thompson, Company G<sup>146</sup>**

Upon its arrival in Petersburg, Virginia on June 1, 1862, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina was quickly transported by rail to Richmond. It was hoped by Confederate authorities that Ransom’s Brigade would be able to participate in the battle then going on near Seven Pines, several miles east of the city. Despite being “ordered double-quick to the battlefield, and passing rapidly through Richmond, anxious to take part in the fray,” the men of the regiment did not arrive on the field until the end of the battle, which largely ended in a bloody draw.<sup>147</sup> The next day, the regiment was once again transferred to a new command, joining the brigade headed by Brigadier General James G. Walker, then stationed at Drewry’s Bluff, and which included the Third Arkansas, Thirtieth Virginia, Forty-Sixth North Carolina, and Fifty-Seventh Virginia Regiments, as well as the Second Georgia Battalion. Lieutenant Graham of Company G described the hurried movements of the regiment during these first few days in Virginia: “We reached Richmond about 12 o’clock on Sunday [June 1] having traveled all day and night before. We have been walking nearly all the time since, sleeping on the ground at night, and reached our present camp about dark last night.”<sup>148</sup> Arriving at their new camp along the James River, located about ten miles south of Richmond, the men of the

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<sup>146</sup> David Thompson, Chester P.O., Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, July 4, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>147</sup> Clark, 428.

<sup>148</sup> Wagstaff, 122.

regiment pitched their tents and adjusted to their new surroundings. The sheer number of soldiers stationed in the Richmond area overwhelmed many of the new arrivals such as Private David Thompson who wrote “I never had any idea that there was so many soldiers in [the] southern Confederacy as there is here.” In the same letter, Thompson described the benefits of the new camp: “we have splendid water to drink...We live very well now, we get better bacon than we did at Kinston.”<sup>149</sup>

During their stay at Drewry’s Bluff, and nearby Camp Jackson, the men of Walker’s Brigade, which remained officially attached to General Holmes’ Department of North Carolina, continued to drill and labored on the entrenchments that made the position such a strong deterrent to Union naval attacks against Richmond. In this position, Lieutenant Sloan remembered, “We remained, constructing fortifications, until the latter part of June.”<sup>150</sup> Private Thompson of Company G stated, “We are throwing up breastworks around Drewry’s Bluff, we have to work at it every other day.”<sup>151</sup> Private Robert Howell of Company A, recently returned to the regiment following a detachment to the Quartermaster Department, described his labor on the entrenchments: “I was detailed to work on the fortifications of Drewry’s Bluff... We were on duty three-fourths of an hour and off 1 1/2 hours. Before my first relief my hands inside had blistered...this

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<sup>149</sup> David Thompson, Drewry’s Bluff, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, June 3, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>150</sup> Sloan, 35.

<sup>151</sup> David Thompson, Chester P.O., Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, June 25, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

work was tough on me but I bore it bravely and did not complain.”<sup>152</sup> Despite hard work, hot weather, nightly rainstorms, and diminishing quantities of rations, the health and spirits of the regiment remained high. Leander Gwynn Hunt, recently appointed Hospital Steward, wrote, “The health of our regiment is very good better than it was at Kinston. We have a very healthy camp. If [the enemy attacks us] we will give them one of the worst whippings they have had yet.”<sup>153</sup> Ensnared in what nearly all the soldiers agreed was an excellent camp and protected by strong fortifications, the men of the Twenty-Seventh awaited action and the orders of General Robert E. Lee, who had only recently been appointed commander of the newly styled Army of Northern Virginia, to which General Holmes’ command, four brigades strong, was now temporarily attached.<sup>154</sup>

During the last week of June, as the Confederate high command planned the counteroffensive against McClellan’s army that would hereafter be known as the “Seven Days,” the men of Walker’s Brigade remained at Drewry’s Bluff, ready to move wherever their orders sent them. Private Samuel Lockhart of Company G wrote on June 24, “We have got orders to march at any time.” The next day David Thompson stated, “We are under marching orders at this time. I don’t know where it is to go to, but it is generally believed that we will go over the river; the news is here now that they are fighting over there now, we can have the guns; if they stand in need of us we will be apt

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<sup>152</sup> Robert Phillips Howell, “Robert Howell Memoirs,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 10.

<sup>153</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Camp Jackson, Virginia, to M.A. Conrad, Clemmonsville, North Carolina, June 15, 1862, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

<sup>154</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 2; Clark, 428.

to go.”<sup>155</sup> Lockhart and Thompson would not have to wait long, for on the evening of June 26, according to Colonel Manning of the Third Arkansas, “orders were received from the Secretary of War for the Fourth Brigade, Brig. Gen. J.G. Walker commanding, to cross the James River and re-enforce Major-General Huger’s division. The Brigade [numbering] about 4,000 men and officers crossed the pontoon bridge, and reached General Huger about 12 p.m. on Friday, June 27.”<sup>156</sup> Once in place, the regiment took up position behind Huger’s troops, whose front, directly east of Richmond, remained quiet throughout the day.<sup>157</sup>

Their attachment to Huger’s command south of the Chickahominy River kept the Twenty-Seventh out of the battle of Gaines’ Mill on June 27. The next day, the brigade crossed the Chickahominy to reinforce Lee’s main body, which was then recovering from the severe bloodletting of the day before. Soon after their arrival, however, the men were again sent off in another direction, this time back across the river and towards the Union army’s left flank. Colonel Manning’s report attempts to make some sense of these movements:

Friday night [June 27] the brigade was ordered to cross the Chickahominy on a bridge thrown across the stream by the enemy, which was accomplished in good order by noon Saturday, and the command moved down and bivouacked [without tents] on the battle-field of the day before, where they remained until Sunday morning, when orders were received to re-cross the Chickahominy and report to Major-General Huger again.

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<sup>155</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Camp Jackson, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, June 24, 1862, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; David Thompson, Chester P.O., Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, June 25, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>156</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 11, 915.

<sup>157</sup> Brian K. Burton, *Extraordinary Circumstances: The Seven Days Battles*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 82, 174; Clark, 428.

Orders came in the afternoon of Sunday [June 29] to move down the river road. The column was immediately put in motion, and after an exceedingly fatiguing march reached General Holmes' division in the evening, in the vicinity of the pontoon bridge across the James River.<sup>158</sup>

Upon rejoining General Holmes' command, Walker's Brigade was placed astride the River Road and in position to assault Malvern Hill, the Union army's last and best defensive position in their retreat towards the safety of Harrison's Landing on the James River. Despite their advantageous positioning to cut off the enemy's retreat, the men of Holmes' division, numbering about 6,000 strong, were too few in number to seriously threaten the Federal defenses, which were backed up by several dozen artillery pieces positioned on high ground and supported by numerous gunboats in the James River. These disadvantages were proven the next day, June 30, when the Confederates moved eastward toward Malvern Hill in an attempt to reconnoiter the Union lines. After Confederate artillery failed to drive off the Union guns, General Holmes, realizing that the Federals in his front were too strong to attack, moved his men back into a defensive position and awaited developments and orders from the main army, which was then engaged in a savage fight near Glendale, several miles north of Malvern Hill. In his report of the operation, General Holmes commented on what happened during the remainder of the day: "A very heavy fire of field artillery was brought to bear upon us from some twenty-five or thirty guns, so placed as, with the aid of the gunboats, to annoy us severely in front and on both flanks at the same time. The enemy kept up a furious cannonade until after dark. Under this my troops behaved well."<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 11, 915; Jordan and Manarin, 2.

<sup>159</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 11, 907; Burton, *Extraordinary Circumstances*, 234-35, 268-71.

To the men in the ranks, the constant movement of the preceding days and the relentless bombardment by the enemy's gunboats combined to make a miserable experience. Lieutenant Sloan of Company B commented, we "were marched from battle-field to battle-field, receiving the shells of the enemy, and acting as targets for their sharpshooters." In commenting on the debacle of June 30, he stated, "We remained under the fire of the enemy's gunboats, whose huge, shrieking shells crashing through the trees and bursting in our midst, inspired a degree of terror not justified by their effectiveness."<sup>160</sup> Newly appointed Assistant Surgeon Leander Hunt also described the plight of the regiment during the day, "our Brigade was shelled by gun boats and two batterys. It was a warm time I can assure you."<sup>161</sup> Despite the intensity of the shelling, and the breaking of other troops nearby, the men of the Twenty-Seventh held their own and maintained their position throughout the long night, during which they most likely got very little rest.

On July 1, while the bulk of Lee's army hurled itself against Malvern Hill in several uncoordinated assaults, the men of Holmes' command once again held their position to the west of the Union stronghold. Difficult terrain, a near parity of numbers on this part of the field, and little or no communication with other Confederate commanders, necessitated this inaction. In describing his predicament, General Holmes' reported: "I deemed it out of the question to attack the strong position on Malvern Hill

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<sup>160</sup> Sloan, 35-36.

<sup>161</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Camp Lee, Virginia, to M.A. Conrad, Clemmonsville, North Carolina, July 20, 1862, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

from that side with my inadequate force.”<sup>162</sup> Despite not being sent into action, the men of the Twenty-Seventh did suffer from continued enemy artillery and gunboat fire as well as the knowledge that they might be ordered to attack at any moment. Lieutenant James Graham, in a post-war account, described the position of the regiment during the long day: “Though not actively engaged, yet we were in a position equally trying, as we got the benefits of the shells of the enemy which passed over the heads of the troops engaged, and burst among the trees under which we were lying, and we were expecting every minute to be ordered forward to take our part in the dreadful carnage.”<sup>163</sup>

Following another miserable night of remaining in their exposed positions and listening to the groans of the wounded from the battlefield, “the next morning the rain began to fall in torrents, and continued for forty-eight hours, rendering the roads almost impassible.”<sup>164</sup> While the rain fell during July 2, reports came in that the Federals were possibly advancing up the James River. Colonel Manning, temporarily in command of Walker’s Brigade, reported: “Orders were received for the brigade to move back to Drewry’s Bluff. After a fatiguing march through a drenching rain and over muddy roads we reached the bluff safely by Thursday morning [July 3].”<sup>165</sup> Lieutenant Sloan described the march back to the regiment’s previous camp:

About sundown we commenced our weary and hard march. Our men were worn out by continuous marching and loss of sleep, still we plodded along, reaching our camp, 17 miles distant, about 3 o’clock in the morning thoroughly drenched. Col. Cooke had gone ahead of us, and having

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<sup>162</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 11, 908; Burton, 348.

<sup>163</sup> Clark, 428-29.

<sup>164</sup> Sloan, 37.

<sup>165</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 11, 915.

aroused the men left in charge of the camp, had great blazing fires in front of our tents awaiting our arrival.<sup>166</sup>

Despite the misery of the previous days and nights, the men of the regiment, as well as the other troops of Walker's Brigade, maintained their discipline and at least some of their morale. According to Colonel Manning, "With few exceptions the conduct of the officers and men, both on the march and in action, was everything that could be desired."<sup>167</sup>

Once back in camp, the men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina reflected upon their involvement in the recent campaign, which had resulted in heavy casualties to both sides and ended with McClellan's army ensconced in a new camp along the James River. Other than being bombarded by the enemy's artillery and gunboats, the regiment was not once engaged and did not have the chance to fire a single shot. Despite losing only six men wounded by enemy fire, the regiment suffered intensely from fatigue, as well as the weather, and evidenced a sense of disappointment at not having been directly engaged. Private Thompson of Company G summed up these feelings in a letter to his mother written on July 4: "We marched last Friday morning and what a march it was we never got into any fight but I would rather have fought a battle than have done the marching that we done. We got back to camp Thursday morning about daylight [and] a good many of the boys broke down on the ground."<sup>168</sup> According to Private Robert Howell of Company A, "We were marched and countermarched around Richmond all the

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<sup>166</sup> Sloan, 37.

<sup>167</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 11*, 915; Jordan and Manarin, 2.

<sup>168</sup> David Thompson, Chester P.O., Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, July 4, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

week...I have never been able to understand why [Holmes] division was not engaged during the week...[upon the march back to Drewry's Bluff] the mud was knee-deep and about half of the command fell out."<sup>169</sup> Despite their exhaustion, the men of the regiment were not destined to get much rest in the coming days as the Army of Northern Virginia tried to capitalize on McClellan's retreat to the James River.<sup>170</sup>

On July 6, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina and the Second Georgia Battalion, with Colonel Cooke in overall command, were moved to Petersburg. Two days later, the two units marched to Fort Powhatan on the James River several miles below City Point. The purpose of these movements became clear to the men in the ranks when on July 11, "five companies of the Twenty-seventh, with two companies of the Georgia Battalion, and Brem's and French's light batteries, were placed in ambush on the high bluff of the James River, with orders to fire upon any boat that might pass." It was hoped that ambushes such as this could interdict some of the supplies and reinforcements being sent to McClellan from reaching his new camp at Harrison's Landing. Before long, the Union transport *Daniel Webster* steamed up river towards the position. The two batteries quickly opened fire, causing significant damage to the vessel, which retreated downstream. "Very soon the gunboats from Harrison's Landing came down, and the woods were really alive with shot and shell for a mile along the bank of the river."<sup>171</sup> Lieutenant Graham of Company G described the action in a letter home: "We are now about 20-25 miles below Petersburg having left camp at Drewry's Bluff last

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<sup>169</sup> Robert Phillips Howell, "Robert Howell Memoirs," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 10-11.

<sup>170</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 2.

<sup>171</sup> Clark, 429-30.

Sunday... We have only been in one little brush and got one pretty good shelling from the Yankee gun boats, but none of our men were hurt at all.”<sup>172</sup>

In the next few days, the men of the Twenty-Seventh, as well as the Georgians, marched back towards Petersburg and went into camp outside of the city. On July 15, Private Thompson wrote: “We have sent for our tents [which were left at Drewry’s Bluff] we are going to camp here, it is in the edge of town...we had a very hard rain last night, we never had any tents and all got wet.”<sup>173</sup> By the next day, all of Walker’s Brigade, and apparently most of their tents, had been moved to the new camp near Petersburg known as Camp Lee, which Assistant Surgeon Leander Hunt thought was “better than any we have had since we came to Va...I hope we will stay here some time.”<sup>174</sup>

On July 16, while the regiment adjusted to its new camp, at least eighty-two men were discharged in accordance with the Conscription Act, which had stipulated that soldiers younger than eighteen and older than thirty-five would remain in the ranks for only ninety days from April 16 before being discharged from service. Numerous other soldiers had already been discharged in the preceding months for physical disability or other health problems. In addition, the onset of sickness within the regiment in the summer of 1862 took many names off the rosters through either death or discharge. On July 20, Assistant Surgeon Hunt mentioned that there was “a great deal of sickness in the Regt. We have lost some three or four men [so far]...we have had a great many cases of

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<sup>172</sup> Wagstaff, 123-24.

<sup>173</sup> David Thompson, Petersburg, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, July 15, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>174</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Camp Lee, Virginia, to M.A. Conrad, Clemmonsville, North Carolina, July 20, 1862 and August 8, 1862, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

Typhoid Fever.”<sup>175</sup> Private Samuel Lockhart of Company G mentioned a week later:

“There are a good many of our men complaining and not able for duty.”<sup>176</sup>

Diseases such as typhoid fever, meningitis, and chronic diarrhea were to blame for most of the health problems within the regiment during this time. Over the summer of 1862, many soldiers would be hospitalized for various conditions. In the worst of cases, the patient would either die or be discharged from service. One of the dead was Corporal John D. Collins, the regimental color bearer, who died of typhoid fever on July 17.<sup>177</sup> Many of the men blamed the high rate of disease on the hot weather, exposure to the elements, and the constant movement of late June and early July, as well as the poor rations then being issued. Lieutenant Graham, who suffered from diarrhea in early July, mentioned that the men of his company “had been living on fat meat and crackers”<sup>178</sup> for weeks during this time. Throughout the war, the Twenty-Seventh would suffer severely from the ravages of disease, which claimed 215 victims, possibly half of whom were lost during 1862 alone. These subtractions from discharge and death reduced the size of the regiment dramatically. In early 1862, as many as 600 men were present for duty; to this number were added more than 100 newly enlisted volunteers and conscripts.

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<sup>175</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98; Leander Gwynn Hunt, Camp Lee, Virginia, to M.A. Conrad, Clemmonsville, North Carolina, July 20, 1862, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

<sup>176</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Camp Lee, Virginia, to Emeline Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, July 27, 1862, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>177</sup> Sloan, 39.

<sup>178</sup> Wagstaff, 124-25.

Nevertheless, by September, following the losses of the spring and summer, which included very few battle casualties, the regiment numbered barely 325 men fit for duty.<sup>179</sup>

Despite the many cases of sickness and the generally decreasing size of the regiment, numerous duties remained that would keep the soldiers of Walker's Brigade, then stationed at Camp Lee, busy during the next month. As McClellan's Army of the Potomac still represented a threat from its camps near Harrison's Landing, continued picket duty and the construction of fortifications in the Petersburg area provided the main occupations for the troops. Private Lockhart mentioned on July 27, "I have just got in off detail. Two of our companies have been out ever since yesterday morning. We started to build fortifications."<sup>180</sup> Three weeks later, David Thompson described Company G's role in the picketing of the James River: "[I have been on] pickett on the river, we came back to camp last night, we had been gone 10 days."<sup>181</sup> The regiment was given more exciting duty on the last day of July when, according to Lieutenant Sloan:

We were sent down the river as support to the artillery, which had been ordered to Coggin's Point to shell McClellan's camp. On the night of the 1<sup>st</sup> of August we had about fifty pieces of our artillery in position...about 2 o'clock in the morning we opened fire upon McClellan's camp on the opposite bank of the river...we kept up a constant fire for several hours, withdrew, and at daylight took up line of march for Petersburg.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

<sup>180</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Camp Lee, Virginia, to Emeline Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, July 27, 1862, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>181</sup> David Thompson, Camp Lee, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, August 18, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>182</sup> Sloan, 38-39.

This show of force, as well as the pending conflict in Northern Virginia between Lee and Union General John Pope, eventually forced McClellan to abandon his position on the Peninsula.<sup>183</sup>

Sometime in early August, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina formed its own regimental band. Since its formation in 1861, each individual company had possessed its own musicians, mostly drummers and fifers, but up to this time the regiment had not yet had the benefits of an organized band. The five original members included Edward B. Higgins, Samuel M. Lipscomb and Thomas J. Sloan of Company B, Samuel A. Dickson of Company G, and James A. Spence of Company D, who is listed as being the Chief Musician of the band later in the war. Nine additional musicians later joined these five men, although the band most likely never contained more than ten players at any given time. Carrying such instruments as drums, fifes, bugles and saxhorn tubas, the band serenaded the regiment both on the march and in camp. During battle, drum beats and bugle calls were essential for giving orders and keeping the men in step. In the aftermath of an engagement, band members often served as stretcher-bearers and assisted the surgeons in medical operations.<sup>184</sup>

During the summer of 1862, the men of the regiment received new uniforms by way of the commutation system mentioned in Chapter One. These included North Carolina manufactured jeans-cloth trousers and newly styled short length jeans-cloth jackets, which replaced the men's longer waisted sack coats. The Quartermaster

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<sup>183</sup> Clark, 430; Jordan and Manarin, 2.

<sup>184</sup> Sloan, 39; Jordan and Manarin, 10; Time-Life Books, eds., *Echoes of Glory: Arms and Equipment of the Confederacy*, (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1996), 220-29.

Department, as well as the folks at home, supplied shoes, socks, and underclothing to the men. Apparently, these sources of supply were sufficient. In late August, Private Thompson wrote: "I am not standing in need of any clothes at present."<sup>185</sup> Another change in the men's wardrobe involved their choice of headgear. Military caps, better known as kepis, were often issued to the men, but their small bills offered scant protection from the sun or the elements. As the war progressed and the men of the regiment became accustomed to life in the field, many soldiers, often with their own money, acquired wide brimmed slouch hats, which proved much more practical than the kepi. The officers of the regiment were also busy arranging for new uniforms during this time. Lieutenant Graham of Company G commented in a letter home: "I have got a new uniform...It costs me \$105 rather a high price, but every thing is very high."<sup>186</sup> The rations available to the men also improved during this time. With better issues of food as well as the possibility of purchasing extra foodstuffs in Petersburg, Assistant Surgeon Leander Hunt commented: "We can get a plenty to eat but every thing is so high." Despite the high prices, the men of the regiment appeared to have been receiving their pay, at least for the moment, and some had been saving large amounts of it. Private Thompson told his sister, "I sent 10 dollars by Miller for you to pay your musick teacher," while Private Lockhart wrote, "I have a good chance to send you some money...I have not drawn my wages yet, but I reckon I will get it tomorrow."<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> David Thompson, Camp Lee, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, August 27, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>186</sup> Wagstaff, 126; Field, *Uniforms of the Confederate Army*, 100.

<sup>187</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Camp Lee, Virginia, to M.A. Conrad, Clemmonsville, North Carolina, August 8, 1862, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina

Meanwhile, as Union General John Pope's Army of Virginia rampaged across Northern Virginia and McClellan remained on the Peninsula, Lee detached General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson northward to deal with Pope. Soon thereafter, most of the rest of the Army of Northern Virginia, under James Longstreet, left the Richmond area as well. Walker's Brigade, including the Twenty-Seventh, in addition to several other brigades, remained behind to protect the Confederate capital. Soon, rumors began circulating in Walker's camps that they too would soon be sent to join the main army. Leander Hunt commented on August 8, "I would not be at all surprised to hear of a big fight at any time" and prophetically mentioned, "there is no chance to get a furlough for more than six hours."<sup>188</sup> Up until this point in the war, the officers and men of the regiment had been able to get furloughs on a regular basis, provided there was no pending movement or engagement. The fact that they were now all but stopped, told the men that something was up. On the morning of August 19, the regiment received orders to prepare to move; David Thompson recalled, "Well we come as near going to old Stone Wall this morning as any thing, we had our tents struck and rations in our haversacks all waiting for the roll to beat when a courier come with a dispatch countermanding the order...I don't think we will go now at all, our brigade will be apt to remain here in defense of

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University, Greenville, North Carolina; David Thompson, Rapidan Station, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, August 27, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Samuel P. Lockhart, Camp Lee, Virginia, to Emeline Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, July 27, 1862, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>188</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Camp Lee, Virginia, to M.A. Conrad, Clemmons ville, North Carolina, August 8, 1862, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

Petersburg or Weldon.”<sup>189</sup> Despite the false alarm and Private Thompson’s prediction, Walker’s Brigade was ordered to move to the outskirts of Richmond the next day. Lieutenant Graham remembered: “We left our camp near Petersburg about daylight last Wednesday [August 20] and arrived here the next day...I do not know how long we will stay here but I expect we will camp somewhere near here.”<sup>190</sup>

In fact, the regiment’s stay in the Richmond area would be very brief. On August 26, Walker’s Brigade boarded the cars of the Virginia Central Railroad and headed north. Their destination, following a switch onto the Orange and Alexandria line, was Rapidan Station, located near Orange Court House approximately sixty miles northwest of Richmond. From this central location, the brigade would be in a position to support Lee’s main body or return quickly to Richmond depending on the circumstances. Private David Thompson described the two-part movement of the regiment from Petersburg to Northern Virginia:

[On August 20] we left for Richmond, we got there friday evening, we expected to go rite on to Stone Wall but we didn’t, we sent back to Petersburg for our tents they got back with them Monday night but we didn’t get them pitched before we got marching orders again...we took the train yesterday morning [August 26] we got here last night about midnight.<sup>191</sup>

Upon their arrival at Rapidan Station, Walker’s Brigade, which now included the Twenty-Seventh, Forty-Sixth and Forty-Eighth North Carolina Regiments, as well as the

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<sup>189</sup> David Thompson, Camp Lee, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, August 19, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>190</sup> Clark, 430; Jordan and Manarin, 2; Wagstaff, 128.

<sup>191</sup> David Thompson, Rapidan Station, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, August 27, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Third Arkansas and Thirtieth Virginia, was combined with the all North Carolina brigade of Robert Ransom to form a new division that would serve within General Longstreet's wing of the Army of Northern Virginia. Brigadier General John G. Walker was appointed to command this division while Colonel Van Manning of the Third Arkansas, who had briefly commanded the brigade during the Seven Days, now commanded Walker's Brigade.<sup>192</sup>

At some point during this reorganization, if not before, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, which was now officially a part of the Army of Northern Virginia, was issued a 48" square St. Andrew's cross Confederate battle flag, probably of the third "bunting" design, which was surrounded by a white border. This banner, which would have been issued by the Richmond Depot, unlike the regiment's state flag, was designed purely for marking the position of a regiment during a battle or on the march, letting the men know where the center of the regiment was, and providing a rallying point for the troops if they were driven from a position or were somehow separated from their comrades. Despite its use as a piece of equipment on the field, a regiment's battle flag also represented that particular unit's battlefield victories and sacrifices. As such, it was often seen as the symbolic emblem of the regiment and would be bravely carried into battle and defended by its bearers, to the death if necessary. The regiment's North Carolina state flag was now relegated to a secondary role, left in the rear during battle and most likely only brought out on special occasions.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 2; Clark, 431.

<sup>193</sup> Dedmond, 17; Time Life Books, *Arms and Equipment of the Confederacy*, 250-51.

While the Twenty-Seventh remained in reserve at Rapidan Station, Lee soundly defeated Pope's army at the Battle of Second Manassas on August 29-30, driving nearly all Federal forces from Northern Virginia in the process. For Confederate leaders, here was an opportunity to take the war into Northern territory, temporarily relieve Virginia of the ravages of the rival armies, attempt to lure Maryland away from the Union, depress the morale of the Northern people, and perhaps win foreign recognition of the Confederacy in the process. Lieutenant Sloan of Company B, writing after the war, recalled:

After the series of engagements at Bull Run and on the Plains of Manassas, the condition of Maryland encouraged the belief that the presence of our army would excite some active demonstration upon the part of her people, and that a military success would regain Maryland. Under these considerations, it was decided by our leaders to cross the Army of Northern Virginia into Western Maryland, and then, by threatening Pennsylvania, to induce the Federal army to withdraw from our territory to protect their own.<sup>194</sup>

While Lee and Confederate President Jefferson Davis agreed to launch an invasion of Maryland, General George McClellan once again assumed command of the scattered and demoralized Federal troops, who now found themselves in defense of their own capital.<sup>195</sup>

As the Army of Northern Virginia moved towards the Potomac River, Walker's Division was ordered to proceed to Leesburg, Virginia to join Lee, providing rear guard security in the process. From here on out, the regiment could not rely on the railroad, as, according to Private Thompson, "the [railroad] bridge is burnt over the Rapidan river, the

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<sup>194</sup> Sloan, 40.

<sup>195</sup> James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 531-35.

yankees burnt it; we will have to march from here to where we have to go.”<sup>196</sup> On September 1, the men of the Twenty-Seventh packed up their belongings, which did not include the regiment’s tents that had been left behind in Richmond, and began the march north. That march would take them “from Rapidan via Culpepper Court House, Warrenton, Manassas [which they reached on September 4] and Leesburg.” In their position as temporary rear guard for the army, detachments from the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, Thirtieth Virginia and Third Arkansas “were charged with keeping up stragglers of the whole army.” As the regiment moved north, spirits rose, some soldiers commented on the beauty of the country, and many looked forward to a victory on Northern soil. Lieutenant James Graham of Company G, commanding a provost detachment charged with picking up stragglers, told his mother, “This is the prettiest country I ever saw...we are in full view of the Blue Ridge...I will write to you when we get to Washington City or Baltimore.”<sup>197</sup>

When Walker’s Brigade left Petersburg and Richmond, many soldiers, too sick to march with the regiment, were left behind at hospitals and private homes. As the regiment moved north, several of these men expressed a determined hope to get well and rejoin their comrades before they met the enemy in battle. Sergeant Joseph F. Maides of Company I wrote to his mother from Richmond, “the regiment left here and is gone towards Gordonsville...there is no telling where they will go. I could not go with them, I hope to be able to go on to the Regt in a few days.” He then demonstrated his

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<sup>196</sup> David Thompson, Rapidan Station, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, August 27, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>197</sup> Wagstaff, 128-30; Clark, 431.

commitment to the regiment and the war when he stated, “I don’t expect to see you till the war is over.” Private Charles J. Watson of Company G, lying sick in a private house in Petersburg, also expressed his desire to participate in the upcoming campaign: “The Regiment has gone to Jackson, the sick was all left here [but] I am going to the Regiment on Monday.”<sup>198</sup>

During the first week of September, the Twenty-Seventh continued its march north through Northern Virginia, which must have been relatively leisurely and pleasant, as there were very few complaints about the pace of the march or the condition of the roads, a dramatic change from the previous campaign. Lieutenant Sloan recorded their daily progress: “On the 4<sup>th</sup>, we reached the battlefield of Manassas, finding many of the enemy’s dead still unburied...On the 5<sup>th</sup> we passed through the villages of Haymarket and New Baltimore, and rested at Leesburg on the evening of the 6<sup>th</sup>.”<sup>199</sup> The bulk of Lee’s army had begun fording the Potomac on September 4, but Walker’s Division, bringing up the rear of the army, did not cross until four days later. On September 8, according to Lieutenant Graham, “We crossed the Potomac at Noland’s Ferry, near Leesburg, Va.” Once across, there arose a bad omen for the Confederate invasion of Maryland. Lieutenant Sloan recalled: “We forded the Potomac and were occupying the shores of “My Maryland.” Our band struck up the “tune,” but the citizens we came in contact with did not seem disposed to “come”.” He then jokingly stated, “We had

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<sup>198</sup> Joseph F. Maides, near Richmond, Virginia, to his Mother, Jones County, North Carolina, August 27, 1862, Joseph F. Maides Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; C.J. Watson, Petersburg, Virginia, to Mr. And Mrs. Watson, Orange County, North Carolina, August 29, 1862, Charles J. Watson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>199</sup> Sloan, 40.

evidently crossed at the wrong ford.” Despite receiving a less than cheerful welcoming in Maryland, the regiment trudged onward and camped for the night at Buckeystown along the Monacacy River south of Frederick City. The next morning, September 9, they marched the few remaining miles to Frederick where Walker’s Division finally re-joined the rest of the army and prepared for the next step in the campaign.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Clark, 431; Sloan, 40; Jordan and Manarin, 2.

## Chapter 4—September-October, 1862

**“General Longstreet needn’t doubt me! We will stay here, by Jesus Christ, if we must go to hell together! That damn thick line of the enemy has been fighting all day, but my regiment is ready to lick the whole damn outfit.”**

**- Colonel John Rogers Cooke<sup>201</sup>**

After joining with Lee’s army outside of Frederick, Maryland on September 9, Walker’s Division, including the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, was, according to General Walker’s report on the operation, “instructed by General Lee to proceed from Monacacy Junction, near Frederick, Md., to the mouth of the Monacacy, and destroy the aqueduct of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal.”<sup>202</sup> It was hoped that by shutting down this transportation route, the Union garrisons at Harper’s Ferry and Martinsburg, which still represented a threat to the Confederate’s supply lines, would be further isolated from Washington and McClellan’s forces. Once this operation was successful, the division was to join with the forces under General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson and assist in the reduction of Harper’s Ferry, hopefully capturing the 12,000-man garrison in the process. Meanwhile, Longstreet would continue moving northward toward Boonsboro or Hagerstown, where the entire army would reassemble after the threat from Harper’s Ferry was eliminated. All of this was based upon the belief that McClellan would take many weeks to assemble and organize his scattered forces, thereby giving Robert E. Lee the time to implement his plan. This plan was laid out in Lee’s Special Orders Number 191, which stated, “Genl Walker with his division after accomplishing the object in which he

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<sup>201</sup> John Michael Priest, *Antietam: The Soldiers’ Battle*, (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Company, 1989), 299.

<sup>202</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 19, Part I*, 912.

is now engaged, will cross the Potomac at Cheek's Ford [and] take possession of Loudon Heights. He will as far as practicable co-operate with Genls McLaws and Jackson and intercept retreat of the enemy."<sup>203</sup>

The object in which the division was now engaged, turned out to be a failure and a waste of precious time. Upon arrival at the aqueduct of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal late on the evening of September 9, and following a minor skirmish with a small Union detachment for possession of the place, General Walker reported: "Working parties were at once detailed, and set to work to drill holes for blowing up the arches, but, after several hours of labor, it was apparent that, owing to the insufficiency of our tools and the extraordinary solidity and massiveness of the masonry, the work we had undertaken was one of days instead of hours."<sup>204</sup> With his mission impossible to complete, Walker decided to march back the way he had come and re-join the main body. At this point, however, he received Orders 191, which directed him to cross the Potomac and seize the Loudon Heights overlooking Harper's Ferry.

Several members of the Twenty-Seventh commented on this aborted demolition project, believing that it was intended only as a diversion. Lieutenant James Graham of Company G, writing after the war, remembered, "On the night of September 9, our division was sent to the mouth of Monacacy river to destroy the aqueduct where the canal crosses. This we were unable to do for want of proper tools, and from after events, it appeared that the movement was but a feint." Lieutenant John Sloan of Company B also

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<sup>203</sup> Clifford Dowdy, ed., *The Wartime Papers of Robert E. Lee*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1961), 302; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 536-37; Stephen W. Sears, *Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983), 90-92.

<sup>204</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 19, Part I*, 912-13.

commented on the occurrence, “We were tramping all night and accomplished nothing; the maneuver, as if afterwards appeared, was but a feint to draw the attention of the enemy away from the movements of “Stonewall’s” corps, then marching on Harper’s Ferry.”<sup>205</sup>

On the evening of the tenth, after discovering that Cheek’s Ford was occupied by enemy forces, Walker “determined to cross at the Point of Rocks which I effected during the night of the 10<sup>th</sup> and by daylight on the 11<sup>th</sup>, but with much difficulty, owing to the destruction of the bridge over the canal and the steepness of the banks of the Potomac.” Earlier in the day, during their march towards the crossing point, the Twenty-Seventh came into contact with Union cavalry scouts. Lieutenant Graham remembered: “Just as we were countermarching a squad of Federal cavalry dashed up to us and immediately wheeled and retired before we could fire. They were evidently scouting and came upon us before they knew it.” On September 11, following the brief run-in with Union cavalry and the difficult crossing, the entire division rested on its arms. The division commander explained: “My men being much worn down by two days’ and nights’ marching, almost without sleep or rest, we remained in camp during the 11<sup>th</sup>, and proceeded the next day toward Harper’s Ferry.”<sup>206</sup>

Following another day on the march and a night of rest near the village of Hillsborough, Virginia, on September 13, the division continued its movement towards the heights overlooking Harper’s Ferry. “About 12 o’clock the division, with the exception of three regiments, went into camp at the foot of Loudon Heights on the eastern

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<sup>205</sup> Clark, 431; Sloan, 41; Jordan and Manarin, 3.

<sup>206</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 19, Part I*, 913; Clark, 431-32.

side of the mountain...the Forty-Sixth North Carolina was sent to guard a pass on the bank of the Potomac, and the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina and Thirtieth Virginia began the ascent of the mountain.”<sup>207</sup> After several reconnaissance details assured General Walker that the heights were free of Union troops, “I detached Col. John R. Cooke, with his regiment (The Twenty-seventh North Carolina), and the Thirtieth Virginia Volunteers, who took possession of the heights without opposition and held them during the night.”<sup>208</sup> Lieutenant Graham described the regiment’s role in taking the heights:

We had several times to leave the road to avoid being seen by the Federal troops in and around Harper’s Ferry, and make our way through thick mountain undergrowth, oftentimes having to clear a way with hatchets or knives, [nevertheless], about 5 p.m., we took possession of Loudon Heights...Soon after we had gained possession, the enemy opened fire upon us from their batteries on the hills beyond the town...but [they] did no damage.<sup>209</sup>

About ten o’clock that night, the men were relieved by the Forty-Eighth North Carolina and returned to their camp at the bottom of the mountain where they assisted in preventing the enemy from escaping along the south bank of the Potomac. Meanwhile, Major General Lafayette McLaws’ Division drove the Federal defenders off of the Maryland Heights north of Harper’s Ferry and Jackson’s troops went into position upon Bolivar Heights west of the town. By the morning of September 14, the unlucky Federal garrison was completely surrounded by Confederate infantry and artillery positioned on high ground.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Clark, 432.

<sup>208</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 19, Part I*, 913.

<sup>209</sup> Clark, 432-33.

<sup>210</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 3; Sears, *Landscape Turned Red*, 98-122.

Throughout the day on the fourteenth, Confederate artillery bombarded the town and its Union defenders. On Loudon Heights, Branch and French's batteries of Walker's Division, which had been dragged up the side of the mountain by hand, "were served admirably and with great rapidity, and in two hours we had silenced an eight-gun battery." While the bombardment continued the next day, the Twenty-Seventh and the remainder of Walker's infantry were relegated to spectators. Lieutenant Sloan remembered: "Early on the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup>, Stonewall Jackson's batteries opened fire from Bolivar Heights, in conjunction with ours and the artillery on Maryland Heights." Under this punishing barrage, the garrison had no hope of hanging on to the town, and, with their escape routes cutoff, were forced to capitulate by 9:30 a.m. Under terms worked out that afternoon, "the garrison, consisting of 11,000 men, surrendered." The Confederates also captured "seventy-three pieces of artillery, 13,000 small arms, and a large quantity of military stores."<sup>211</sup>

While the troops under Jackson, McLaws, and Walker captured Harper's Ferry, the remainder of Lee's small army was fighting for its very survival against a more aggressive than anticipated McClellan and his much larger Army of the Potomac. In a twist of fate, a copy of Special Orders 191, destined for General D.H. Hill, was accidentally lost in a field near Frederick. On September 13, two Union soldiers discovered the lost order and sent its contents up the Union chain of command. Emboldened by now knowing Lee's entire operational plan, McClellan, now intent on taking advantage of the dispersed nature of the Confederate army, moved much more

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<sup>211</sup> Clark, 433; U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 19, Part I*, 913; Sloan, 42; Sears, 152-53.

quickly to the attack than Lee or any other Confederate general believed he would. On September 14, as Walker's men dragged their artillery to the top of Loudon Heights, Federal troops slowly drove Lee's rear guard off of South Mountain and threatened to envelop nearly half of the Army of Northern Virginia. Initially deciding to retreat back into Virginia, Lee then learned that Jackson planned to capture Harper's Ferry very soon. This intelligence, along with the hope of still salvaging the campaign with a victory against the usually timid McClellan, who had now relapsed into his typical cautious nature, caused Lee to decide to stay and fight it out, thereby preserving Confederate morale and possibly mauling the larger Federal force in the process. Seeing that he must reunite his army if he was to have any chance of holding off McClellan's force of nearly 80,000, Lee ordered his dispersed columns, which altogether numbered fewer than 40,000 men, to concentrate at Sharpsburg, Maryland, a small town only a mile from the banks of the Potomac and the one local ford that offered an escape route back into Virginia in case of defeat.<sup>212</sup>

Upon learning of Lee's concentration order on the afternoon of the fifteenth, Walker's Division, including the Twenty-Seventh, immediately marched for Sharpsburg, fifteen miles away. Lieutenant Graham remembered, "As soon as the surrender was known we crossed the mountain and started for Sharpsburg [and] camped near Hall Town that night," while Lieutenant Sloan recalled, "On the night of the 15<sup>th</sup> we made our descent from the heights, crossed the mountain and resumed our march." After a brief night's rest, the regiment continued forward and "about midday of the 16<sup>th</sup> we reached

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<sup>212</sup> Sears, 114-153, 173-74; McPherson, 536-38.

Shepardstown, crossed the Potomac and went into camp near Sharpsburg, Maryland.” Placed in reserve near the town, the regiment had a relatively peaceful night’s rest, that is if anyone was able to sleep knowing that a brutal battle was to be fought the next day. Meanwhile, General Lee organized his thin defensive line, while McClellan, who had thrown away an entire day’s worth of opportunity by not attacking on September 16, planned a knockout blow that would crush the Confederate force. The men of both armies prepared for the expected battle of the next day.<sup>213</sup>

Before dawn on September 17, as both Confederate and Union troops continued to shuffle into position, Walker’s Division was ordered to proceed to the extreme right of the Confederate line and cover Snavely’s Ford over Antietam Creek, a small but steeply banked watercourse that largely separated the two rival armies. General Walker described this position in his official report on the battle:

In accordance with his [Lee’s] instructions, at daylight the next morning I placed the division on the extreme right of our position and 1 1/2 miles south of Sharpsburg, my line of battle extending from a wood on the right to a group of barns, stables and outhouses on the left, in such way as to cover the ford over the Antietam Creek and to be within supporting distance of the command of Brigadier General Toombs, which lay in front of the bridge across the same stream.<sup>214</sup>

Upon the regiment’s arrival at the new position, Lieutenant Graham recalled, “our left rested upon the yard of a man whose name I did not learn, who, to prevent our getting water, broke off his pump handle and destroyed his pump, so that we were compelled to

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<sup>213</sup> Clark, 433; Sloan, 42; Jordan and Manarin, 3; Sears, 154-79.

<sup>214</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 19, Part I*, 914.

fill our canteens from a mud hole [which, nevertheless] served very well to quench thirst.”<sup>215</sup>

Numbering 325 men present for duty, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina remained in this position until around 9:00 a.m., when, in response to the continual and savage fighting on the endangered Confederate left, Walker’s Division was ordered to proceed to the left center of the line to support the troops under Jackson and D.H. Hill, who had been contending all morning with elements of the Union First, Second, and Twelfth Corps. General Walker remembered, “Soon after 9 a.m., I received orders from General Lee to hasten to the extreme left, to the support of Major-General Jackson.” The regiment immediately proceeded north along the Hagerstown Turnpike. According to Lieutenant Graham, “After double-quicking one and half or two miles we were placed in line about one mile to the left of the town of Sharpsburg.”<sup>216</sup> At this point, about 10 o’clock according to Walker, the Twenty-Seventh as well as the Third Arkansas, both under the temporary command of Colonel John Cooke of the Twenty-Seventh, were detached from Manning’s Brigade in order to cover a dangerous gap, perhaps 1/3 mile wide, that existed between D.H. Hill’s position in the “Sunken Road” and Jackson’s position in and around the West Woods and the Dunker Church. While the remainder of Manning’s Brigade continued north and drove the Federals from the hotly contested woods, Cooke’s small command, now under fire from Federal artillery, moved into position on their right, perhaps 600 yards south of the Dunker Church. Lieutenant Graham remembered the deployment, “Forming in a corn field we advanced under a

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<sup>215</sup> Clark, 433.

<sup>216</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 19, Part I*, 914; Clark, 433-34; Wagstaff, 130.

heavy fire of grape and canister at a quick step, up a little rise, and halted at a rail fence,” where the men were ordered to lie down. Posted atop a small ridgeline, the Twenty-Seventh, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Richard Singletary, in addition to the Arkansans, who advanced into a stubble field to the Tarheels’ right front, protected not only the gap in the line but also Manning’s right flank.<sup>217</sup>

Having driven the Federals of Brigadier General George Greene’s Division from the West Woods, Manning’s Brigade continued forward across the Hagerstown turnpike. After crossing the fence along the pike, Manning’s regiments were hit with intense musketry fire that inflicted heavy casualties, including Manning himself, and caused many of his soldiers, particularly from the Forty-Eighth North Carolina, to panic and retreat quickly back into the woods. A horrified General Walker, viewing the disintegration of Manning’s troops recorded: “The falling back of a portion of Manning’s brigade enabled the enemy to temporarily reoccupy the point of woods near the position assigned to Colonel Cooke, upon whom the enemy opened a galling fire, which was replied to with spirit.”<sup>218</sup> Seeing this development, Colonel Cooke refused his left flank. According to Lieutenant Graham of Company G, “Companies F, K, and G, the three left companies of the Twenty-seventh, [which were now faced to the north and protected by another rail fence], were directed to center their fire upon that point.” Meanwhile, the center and right companies, in addition to the whole of the Third Arkansas, which were being hit from the front by enemy artillery and musketry fire, were “ordered to fall back some twenty steps and lie down in the corn.” While the three left wing companies traded

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<sup>217</sup> Clark, 434-36; Priest, *Antietam*, 151-54.

<sup>218</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 19, Part I*, 915.

fire with the Federals in the West Woods, Colonel Cooke, coolly surveying the situation from the shade of a hickory tree, remained exposed along the ridgeline in front of the two regiments. Miraculously, he remained untouched despite the intensity of the Federal fire. After perhaps thirty minutes of receiving intermittent fire from the Twenty-Seventh's left wing companies, and beginning to run out of ammunition, the Federals of Greene's Division pulled back further into the woods and halted their advance.<sup>219</sup>

At this point, probably around noon, while Ransom and the remainder of Manning's Brigade were preparing to eject the Federals from the West Woods once again and the fighting for the Sunken Road was becoming more desperate, Colonel Hector Tyndall, one of Greene's brigade commanders, ordered two guns of Knapp's Battery E, First Pennsylvania Light Artillery, to move forward from the Mumma swale and shell the position occupied by Cooke's troops. According to Lieutenant Graham, "the enemy attempted to sneak up a section of artillery to the little woods on our left. Colonel Cooke, watching the movement, ordered the four left companies of the Twenty-seventh North Carolina up to the fence and directed them to fire upon this artillery."<sup>220</sup> While the four left companies moved forward to the northeastern corner of the cornfield and concealed themselves behind its rail fence, the remainder of Walker's Division attacked the Federals in the West Woods. As Ransom's Tarheels struck Tyndall's Brigade with a fury and quickly drove them out of the woods into the open fields of the Mumma farm, Cooke's men unleashed a deadly volley into the gunners and horses of Knapp's battery. Lieutenant Graham, who helped direct the fire of Company G, remembered, "the enemy

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<sup>219</sup> Clark, 434; Priest, 152-54.

<sup>220</sup> Clark, 434.

brought up two pieces of artillery to within 250 or 300 yards of us, before they could get their pieces into action we had killed every horse hitched to them and about half the men.”<sup>221</sup> The accuracy achieved by this volley is evidence that many of the men in the regiment may have been armed with rifled-muskets by this point in the war. General Walker, directing the action of his division from behind the lines, summarized these fast paced events: “[Cooke’s men] kept up an effective fire upon the enemy, driving his artillerists from a battery they were attempting to get into position to bear upon Colonel Cooke’s command...In the mean time, Brigadier-General Ransom, whose brigade was farther on the left, had driven the enemy through and from the woods with heavy loss.”<sup>222</sup>

From the beginning of Cooke’s detachment earlier that morning, General Walker had reportedly given Colonel Cooke directions to push forward if the circumstances seemed favorable of success. Lieutenant Graham recalled, “[Cooke], had received orders to charge if opportunity offered.” Following Tyndall’s retreat and the Twenty-Seventh’s downing of Knapp’s horses and gunners, Cooke believed that opportunity had come and ordered his men forward. Walker’s report, on the other hand, states that General Longstreet actually gave Cooke the order to attack: “Early in the afternoon, Major-General Longstreet directed Colonel Cooke, with his own regiment and the Third Arkansas, to charge the enemy, who was threatening his front [at the Sunken Road], as if to pass through the opening between the point of timber held by Ransom’s brigade and Longstreet’s left.”<sup>223</sup> Whoever directed Cooke to advance, it was the colonel himself

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<sup>221</sup> Wagstaff, 132.

<sup>222</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 19, Part I*, 915-16; Priest, 178-79.

<sup>223</sup> Clark, 435; U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 19, Part I*, 915.

who led the charge. The target of the attack was the Mumma farm and swale, which was packed with Tyndall's retreating soldiers. Lieutenant Graham remembered the moment, "Without waiting a second word of command, both regiments leaped the fence and went at them." Captain Joseph C. Webb of Company G, who, although not present during the battle, received details from numerous officers and men, recalled, "The Colonel gave the order to charge, he says such a yell he never heard before. The men started all together with a will, and when they got near the Yankees they broke and ran; and our men would stop to get steady aim, then start reloading as they went."<sup>224</sup> As the two regiments advanced into the open fields of the Mumma farm, an unusual incident occurred. James Graham, in his history of the regiment, wrote:

Soon after we started the charge, some drunken officer on horseback (who or of what command I never learned), rode in front of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, and pulling off and waving his hat, yelled out, "Come on boys, I'm leading this charge." Lieutenant Colonel Singletary immediately ran up to him (the regiment being then at the double quick) and replied, "You are a liar sir; we lead our own charges."<sup>225</sup>

As Cooke's command advanced at the double quick across the open fields and towards the now ruined Mumma farmhouse, a man from the Third Arkansas, who happened to have a fiddle with him on the battlefield, began playing a favorite mountain tune entitled "Granny Does Your Dog Bite?," which lent an interesting musical twist to the bursting of the shells and the whining of the minie balls. Almost immediately, the two regiments received artillery fire from a battery positioned to their left front. In addition, several regiments of Tyndall's Brigade, now rallied near the Mumma swale,

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<sup>224</sup> Clark, 435; Joseph C. Webb, Winchester, Virginia, to an unknown friend, Hillsborough, North Carolina, October 9, 1862, Cooke Family Papers, The Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>225</sup> Priest, 179-80; Clark, 436.

opened fire on the advancing Confederates. Viewing the charge from nearby, General Walker reported: "Battery after battery and, regiment after regiment opened their fire upon them, hurling a torrent of missiles through their ranks, but nothing could arrest their progress."<sup>226</sup> Despite the heavy fire and the substantial casualties it was inflicting on the two regiments, Cooke's men continued forward, and soon "had the troops in front of us in full retreat." As the charge continued across the fields, hundreds of Federals hunkered down in the swale, largely from Tyndall's Brigade of Ohio and Pennsylvania troops, were overrun and forced to surrender following a brief spat of hand to hand fighting. Lieutenant Graham remembered: "Two or three hundred took shelter behind a lot of haystacks, and fastening white handkerchiefs to their muskets and bayonets, held them out offering to surrender. We pushed on, and soon wheeling to the right drove down their line giving them an enfilade fire, and succeeded in breaking six regiments, which fled in confusion." Although Graham's narrative may be a slight exaggeration, the Twenty-Seventh along with the Third Arkansas and elements of Cobb's Brigade of Georgians and North Carolinians, did succeed in pushing the Federals from the cover of the Mumma swale and severely disrupted part of the Union attack against the Sunken Road, doing particularly great damage to the First Delaware Regiment in the process.<sup>227</sup>

During the height of the charge, which had now been going on for all of ten minutes, William Campbell, the Twenty-Seventh's color bearer, continued to move in advance of the regiment in order to keep apace with the colors of the Third Arkansas. When Cooke finally succeeded in getting him to slow down, Campbell angrily replied,

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<sup>226</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 19, Part I*, 915.

<sup>227</sup> Clark, 435; Priest, 186-87.

“Colonel, I can’t let that Arkansas fellow get ahead of me!” From the beginning of the attack, Cooke had assumed that Ransom and Manning’s troops to his left would advance in tandem with his command, thereby silencing the Federal artillery that continued to rake his left flank companies. Despite a half-hearted attempt to move out of the West Woods, however, the rest of Walker’s Division offered no support to Cooke’s small force. General Walker explained this inaction: “It was determined that the attempt to force the enemy’s right with our fearfully thinned ranks and in the exhausted condition of our men was an effort above our strength.”<sup>228</sup>

After advancing quickly several hundred yards across the Mumma fields, much of it at the right wheel, the left wing companies of the Twenty-Seventh occupied the remains of the Mumma house and outbuildings, while the remainder of the troops were now spread out from the Mumma farm to the cornfield bordering the Sunken Road. To their front, across several hundred yards of open ground, the Fifty-Third Pennsylvania Regiment, as well as additional troops of the Union Second Corps, were taking up a strong position behind a stone wall and in the fields of the Roulette farm, intent on stopping the Confederate counterattack. Although the artillery fire from the left had stopped, due to the presence of Federal prisoners and wounded in Cooke’s rear, both regiments had suffered heavy casualties, ammunition was running out, and the momentum of the charge was all but gone. Lieutenant Graham recalled the high water mark of the charge, “After pushing on, we found ourselves opposed by a body of the enemy behind a stone wall in a corn field. Stopping to contend with these we found that

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<sup>228</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 19, Part I*, 916; Priest, 186-87.

we were almost out of ammunition; the cartridges which we had captured on the field not fitting our guns.”<sup>229</sup> In addition to the threat from the front, two Union regiments, the Twentieth New York and Seventh Maine of Colonel William Irwin’s Brigade, were rapidly moving upon the Twenty-Seventh’s left flank and rear, threatening to cut off their escape route. “Colonel Cooke, learning this fact, and seeing that we were not supported in our charge, ordered us to fall back to our original position. This of course was done at the double-quick.”<sup>230</sup> General Longstreet, the man who may very well have ordered Cooke to attack, reported: “Colonel Cooke, of the Twenty-seventh North Carolina, very gallantly charged with his own regiment, but, his supply of ammunition being exhausted and he being unsupported, he was obliged to return to his original position in the line.”<sup>231</sup>

In many ways, the retreat back across the open fields was just as deadly as the advance had been. In addition to the rapidly approaching Twentieth New York to their left and the Seventh Maine to the front, Lieutenant Graham recalled, “we experienced the perfidy of those who had previously surrendered to us and whom we had not taken time to disarm. They, seeing that we were not supported, attempted to form a line in our rear and in a few minutes would have done so. As it was, we had to pass between two fires. A bloody lane indeed it proved to us.”<sup>232</sup> Despite General Walker’s contention that Cooke’s retreat “was done in the most perfect order,” it seems unlikely that the two regiments did anything but run as quickly as possible toward the rear in order to escape the ensuing trap. The Twenty-Seventh, positioned on the left of Cooke’s line and with

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<sup>229</sup> Clark, 435; This quote once again confirms that at least some of the men of the Twenty-Seventh were armed with smaller caliber rifled-muskets by this point in the war.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 19, Part I*, 840; Priest, 194-99.

<sup>232</sup> Clark, 435.

the Twentieth New York barely sixty yards away, suffered the most from this enfilade fire, which most likely caused a large percentage of its casualties this day. Finally, after running the gauntlet of Union musketry, losing men at every step, including Lieutenant Colonel Singletary, and crossing the Hagerstown Pike, both the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, now commanded by Major John Gilmer, and the Third Arkansas regained their original position in the cornfield at the rail fence, behind which the survivors quickly took cover. It was now close to 1:00 p.m. Incredibly, the day, and the battle, was far from over for Cooke's exhausted and badly cut-up command.<sup>233</sup>

With the eventual fall of the Sunken Road position, which had occurred almost simultaneously with the retreat of Cooke's command, the center of the Confederate line was left in jeopardy. At this point, a renewed Union attack stood a good chance of breaking Lee's weakened army in two. Aside from Ransom's men in the West Woods and a small force under General D. H. Hill then reforming behind the Sunken Road, Cooke's exhausted men were the only troops available to stop any new attack in this area. As the men of the Twenty-Seventh hunkered down behind the fence, General Lee approached the remnants of the two regiments and supposedly shouted, "Boys, you must hold the center or General Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia will be prisoners in less than two hours." A few minutes later, General Longstreet and his staff galloped up and quickly manned an abandoned artillery piece, firing a round into the now advancing ranks of the Twentieth New York of Irwin's Brigade. Cooke's men opened fire with their few remaining cartridges. Longstreet also sent Major Moxley Sorrell to Colonel

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<sup>233</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 19, Part I*, 916; Priest, 197-201.

Cooke telling him he must hold his position at all hazards. According to Lieutenant Graham, Cooke replied, "Tell General Longstreet to send me some ammunition. I have not a cartridge in my command, but will hold my position at the point of the bayonet." In response to another plea for him to hold his position, Cooke adamantly stated, "General Longstreet needn't doubt me! We will stay here, by Jesus Christ, if we must go to hell together! That damn thick line of the enemy has been fighting all day, but my regiment is ready to lick the whole damn outfit."<sup>234</sup>

While Irwin's Brigade of New Yorkers advanced across the fields of the now devastated Mumma farm, the guns of Miller's Battery of the Washington Artillery, partly manned by Longstreet's staff, fired canister into their ranks. Cooke's troops, now completely out of ammunition, could only maintain their position as a show of force in order to support the artillery. Lieutenant Graham recalled the trying position the regiment found itself in, "The rail fence, which was our only protection, was riddled with bullets and torn with shot and shell and our men were falling fast, but still the Twenty-seventh North Carolina and Third Arkansas flinched not. Imbued with the courage of their commander, they stood firm to their post."<sup>235</sup> General Longstreet, viewing the action from behind the artillery, also remembered this critical moment in his report on the battle:

Our center was extremely weak, being defended by but part of Walker's division and four pieces of artillery; Cooke's regiment being without a cartridge. In this condition, again the enemy's masses moved forward against us. Cooke stood with his empty guns, and waved his colors to show that his troops were in position. The artillery played upon their

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<sup>234</sup> Priest, 198, 299; Clark, 436; Sears, 250-51.

<sup>235</sup> Clark, 436-37.

ranks, with canister. Their lines began to hesitate, soon halted, and after an hour and a half retired.<sup>236</sup>

In the end, the spirit showed by the bloodied and exhausted survivors of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina and the Third Arkansas, in addition to the support of the artillery, the continued presence of Ransom's Brigade in the West Woods, and a near suicidal counterattack by elements of D.H. Hill's Division, stopped the equally exhausted Federals from advancing any further on this part of the field; the Confederate center had held. General Lee, in his report on the Maryland Campaign, mentioned seeing "Colonel Cooke, with the Twenty-seventh North Carolina Regiment, standing boldly in line without a cartridge." He went on to report, "The firm front presented by this small force and the well directed fire of the artillery, under Captain Miller, of the Washington Artillery, and Captain Boyce's South Carolina battery, checked the progress of the enemy." It is significant to note that Lee's citing of the Twenty-Seventh was the only instance in his official report on the entire Maryland Campaign in which he noted the actions of a specific regiment.<sup>237</sup>

As the battle shifted to the southern end of the Confederate line, where soldiers of the Union Ninth Corps, under General Ambrose Burnside, finally captured the bridge over Antietam Creek and advanced toward Sharpsburg only to be stopped in their tracks by the timely arrival of A.P. Hill's Division from Harper's Ferry, the men of the Twenty-Seventh remained in their positions until late in the afternoon. Finally, "between 4 and 5 o'clock we were relieved and were moved about a mile to the rear to get ammunition and

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<sup>236</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 19, Part I, 840.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 150; Sears, 251-54.

fresh water.” Before night came, however, Lieutenant Graham recalled, “we were marched again to the front and placed in position just behind and in support of the troops who had relieved us. Here we were subjected to a severe shelling, but had not the chance to return fire.” After nightfall, the regiment, along with their Arkansas comrades, moved to the left, to the vicinity of the West Woods, where they rejoined what remained of Walker’s Division and quickly dropped to the ground to get some badly needed rest.<sup>238</sup>

The actions of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina on this day had been remarkable. Under the cool leadership of Colonel John R. Cooke, the regiment, in addition to the Third Arkansas, had not only held its position in the face of superior numbers and firepower, but had also taken center stage in a magnificent, albeit ultimately unsuccessful, counterattack against a large force of the enemy, inflicting heavy casualties in the process. In addition, the brave stand by Cooke’s men, who at the time were out of ammunition and down to holding their position with the bayonet, made a vital contribution to staving off the final Union attack of the afternoon against the Confederate center. Their actions following the fall of the Sunken Road helped to avert a possible breakthrough that, given proper support from McClellan’s ample reserves, could have resulted in the defeat or complete destruction of the Army of Northern Virginia. In a post-war article in *Century Magazine*, General Longstreet elaborated on the magnitude of the moment, “It was easy to see that if the Federals broke through our line there the Confederate army would be cut in two and probably destroyed, for we were already badly

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<sup>238</sup> Sears, 255-92; Clark, 437; Jordan and Manarin, 3.

whipped, and were only holding our ground by sheer force of desperation.”<sup>239</sup>

Ultimately, convinced that the Confederate forces in his front were too strong to defeat and could even counterattack him at any time, McClellan refused to release most of his reserves, including the entire Union Fifth Corps, and ultimately gave Lee the chance to rest and pull back his badly outnumbered and battered army. The Twenty-Seventh had played an important role in influencing McClellan’s decision regarding this part of the battlefield.<sup>240</sup> In summing up the actions of the regiment, General Walker reported: “The conduct of the division was generally excellent, and, in some instances, was brilliant in the extreme. I desire particularly to call attention to the admirable conduct of the Twenty-seventh North Carolina, commanded by Col. John R. Cooke, and the Third Arkansas Volunteers.”<sup>241</sup>

The important role played by the regiment during the battle had come at an enormous cost. Losses suffered on September 17 amounted to nearly seventy percent of those engaged; of the 325 men who were reported present for duty in the morning, fewer than 100 were still standing by that evening. The Twenty-Seventh North Carolina had suffered an incredible 226 total casualties, including thirty-two men killed, 181 wounded, and thirteen captured or missing. Of the wounded, eighteen would later die of their wounds while the enemy captured thirty-eight more as they lay incapacitated on the field. Of the regiment’s field officers, Lieutenant Colonel Singletary was severely wounded while both Colonel Cooke and Major Gilmer miraculously emerged unscathed. Another

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<sup>239</sup> James Longstreet, article which appeared in June issue of *Century Magazine* probably during the 1880s, located in “Cooke’s Scrapbook,” John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>240</sup> Sears, 254-57.

<sup>241</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 19, Part I*, 917.

near miracle of the day was the survival of color bearer William Campbell, who, despite carrying the regimental battle flag throughout the fight, received not so much as a scratch. The flag, on the other hand, was nearly shredded in this, the regiment's first battle as an official part of the Army of Northern Virginia. Private David Thompson of Company G recalled: "Bill Campbell from our company carried the colors, it had 37 bullet holes through it [but] he wasn't hurt." Another loss this day was Sergeant Major R. W. Dupree, who had replaced James Whitfield back in February. Wounded in the chest and captured by the enemy, Dupree was quickly replaced by Walter Ashland Knight of Company A, who took on the role of acting sergeant major until a more permanent decision could be made.<sup>242</sup>

Each company of the regiment suffered heavily but some were hit harder than others. Company B, undoubtedly the largest company in the regiment, lost forty men, including seven killed and one mortally wounded; among the dead was Captain William Adams, who had been shot through the chest. Company H, which must also have been a rather large unit, suffered thirty-seven casualties, including four men killed and six captured. "Another (Company E), with an average company and a full complement of officers, lost its Captain [Jason Joyner], First Lieutenant and Second Lieutenant killed, and two-thirds of its men killed or wounded;" these losses totaled twenty-six out of perhaps forty men in the company. Company G was also dreadfully reduced, losing twenty-five men, including three killed and two mortally wounded, out of only thirty

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<sup>242</sup> David Thompson, Martinsburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, September 23, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

engaged. The company with the fewest losses by far was Company I, which lost only one man killed and five wounded during the entire engagement. Most of the remaining companies suffered losses near fifty percent or higher. The Third Arkansas, which went into the fight with roughly 350 men and “was side by side with the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina in all the trying times of that day,” had also suffered heavy casualties, losing twenty-seven dead and 155 wounded in addition to an undetermined number of captured or missing.<sup>243</sup>

More than simple numbers, however, the losses of the regiment at Sharpsburg affected individuals' lives and the lives of the families they left behind. Private John Seymore of Company C was killed instantly during the charge across the Mumma fields, leaving behind a young widow and a fatherless child back home in Lenoir County. Twenty-five year old Private Robert Donnell of Company B received a wound in the leg that required amputation; captured by the Federals, he died of his wounds in a Union hospital in Chester, Pennsylvania in early November, leaving his grieving parents to mourn his death. Many soldiers, such as Allen King of Company A, who lost his right arm, had to be discharged after losing limbs to amputation, a disability that would affect them for the rest of their lives. In addition to deaths and amputations, less serious wounds abounded. Private Joab Newsome of Company K received a wound which kept him out of the ranks for barely two months, while the avid letter writer David Thompson of Company G recalled a week after the battle, “I got a slight wound in the early part of the engagement by a piece of shell that broke a fence rail and struck my shoulder and

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<sup>243</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98; Clark, 437; Priest, 322.

knocked the blood out of my ear, it bruised my shoulder so that I could not use my gun again, though I am nearly well now.”<sup>244</sup>

Despite the horrendous losses suffered by the regiment, Cooke’s men, now positioned on the extreme left of the Confederate line, were once again readied for battle on the morning of September 18. Throughout the day, the Confederate army remained in position as if tempting McClellan to attack again. Lee was taking a bold risk in maintaining his position, his army now numbered barely 30,000 men compared with an ever-increasing Army of the Potomac. Despite his numerical advantage and the indecisive results of the previous day’s battle, McClellan was content to let the rebels alone. While Lee held his ground this day in order to maintain the morale of his battered army and secure his line of retreat, the Union commander continued to believe that the Confederates posed more of a threat than they truly did. Therefore, little or no action occurred along the lines during the day.<sup>245</sup>

In reality, both sides were battered and exhausted following the bloodbath of September 17. The Confederates had lost an estimated 10,300 men while the Federals suffered more than 12,400 casualties. In many ways the battle had been a draw, but Lee’s Maryland Campaign was over. On the night of September 18 and during the day on the nineteenth, the Army of Northern Virginia, including thousands of wounded, utilized the ford one mile west of Sharpsburg, slipped across the Potomac and was once again in Virginia. McClellan did little to prevent their escape. General Lee recorded the

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<sup>244</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98; David Thompson, Martinsburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, September 23, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>245</sup> McPherson, 544-45; Jordan and Manarin, 3; Sears, 298-99.

retreat in his official report of the campaign: “As we could not look for a material increase in strength, and the enemy’s force could be largely and rapidly augmented, it was not thought prudent to wait until he should be ready to again offer battle. During the night of the 18<sup>th</sup> the army was accordingly withdrawn to the south side of the Potomac, crossing near Shepardstown, without loss or molestation.”<sup>246</sup>

What remained of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, according to Lieutenant Graham, “retreated on the night of September 18<sup>th</sup>, crossing the Potomac at Shepardstown about daylight on the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup>.” Captain John Sloan of Company B, promoted to his new position on the night of the battle, remembered, “After fording the river, we halted a short distance on the hills nearby, engaged in drying our clothing and making a breakfast from our scanty rations of pop-corn and hard tack.”<sup>247</sup> During the day, elements of the Union Fifth Corps made an attempt to pursue the Confederates by crossing the river above Shepardstown, but were quickly turned back by A.P. Hill’s Division. With the Army of Northern Virginia in tatters, Lee decided to withdraw south to the vicinity of Martinsburg, Virginia, where the army could rest, reorganize and prepare for further action. Captain Sloan recalled the movement of the regiment to Martinsburg:

The condition of our troops now demanding repose, we were ordered to the Occoquan [River] near Martinsburg. On our march another attempt to harass our rear was reported, and [on September 20] we were sent back to the vicinity of Shepardstown; finding “all quiet on the Potomac,” the march was again resumed at night, and on the 21<sup>st</sup> we went into camp near Martinsburg.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 19, Part I*, 151; Sears, 294-97.

<sup>247</sup> Clark, 437; Sloan, 48.

<sup>248</sup> Sloan, 48.

Once in camp outside of town, the survivors of the regiment rested and reorganized their shattered companies, electing new officers and non-commissioned officers to replace the fallen. With Lieutenant Colonel Singletary out of action due to severe wounds, Colonel Cooke and Major Gilmer remained to manage the reduced regiment. It would not be until the first of November that a reorganization of field officers would take place. At the company level, however, numerous changes were made. In Company B, First Lieutenant Sloan was promoted in order to replace the deceased Captain Adams. First Lieutenant Rufus Gibson, who had been captured, would return to the company in November, while Second Lieutenant Charles Campbell soon recovered from his wounds. The men of Company E had to choose an entirely new officer corps, as enemy fire had decimated its command. Robert Joyner was elected captain, while Ernul McGreiger and James Tyer, who had been slightly wounded himself, were chosen as lieutenants. With Captain Joseph Webb's return to Company G, following a trip to Raleigh to collect recruits, Third Lieutenant Graham, who had temporarily commanded the company following the capture of First Lieutenant Whitted and the sickness of Lieutenant Dickson, was now reduced to his original position. Given its heavy losses, it is remarkable that most of the officers of Company H emerged unscathed, requiring little adjustment. The same was true for Company K. The remaining companies witnessed a few changes but required no serious alterations in their command structures.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

During their brief rest, the soldiers also wrote home, something many had not been able to do for some time, to let loved ones know that they were all right. Many soldiers also reflected on their role in the battle, proudly telling those at home of their accomplishments on the field. Third Lieutenant Graham, temporarily in command of Company G, told his parents, “Our regiment was engaged for 7 hours...Our men behaved very well and were highly commended by every General on the field and Gen. Lee said that a charge that our two regiments made, changed the fortunes of the day...If only we had been supported by the rest of our troops we would have carried the day before us for we broke their lines completely.”<sup>250</sup> Private Thompson of the same company also commented on the failure of other troops to support their charge: “Our regiment is cut all to pieces...we run them back but we didn’t get support in time.”<sup>251</sup>

Despite their combination of pride and anger, the soldiers of the Twenty-Seventh quickly took stock of the current situation. The regiment, in addition to having suffered enormous casualties, had also lost nearly all of its baggage at Sharpsburg. Lieutenant Graham, writing after the war, explained: “In consequence of the change of position from the extreme right to the center at Sharpsburg we lost our knapsacks and blankets, having piled them up by companies as we entered the fight and being unable, on account of the change of position, to get them, as we intended.”<sup>252</sup> Some men, despite the above quote, were able to acquire new blankets from the battlefield, possibly off of the dead. Private Thompson, writing just days after the battle, mentioned having “a good blanket and

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<sup>250</sup> Wagstaff, 130-32.

<sup>251</sup> David Thompson, Martinsburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, September 23, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>252</sup> Clark, 438.

oilcloth.” In the aftermath of the Maryland Campaign, much of the Army of Northern Virginia suffered from exhaustion as well as a lack of rations, clothing, shoes, blankets, and tents. Captain Joseph Webb of Company G, just returned to the company, commented, “the army was marched continuously night and day, for twenty-one days previous to the battle; they were only half fed...there were also a large number of bare footed and foot-sore.”<sup>253</sup> The health and sanitation of the regiment, however, was apparently better than average during this time. David Thompson recalled: “Our army is getting very lousy but I haven’t seen any yet in our regiment and I am in hopes I won’t.”<sup>254</sup>

The stay at Martinsburg would prove to be only a temporary halt. During the last week of September, the army continued the march south into the Shenandoah Valley, arriving four miles outside of Winchester on September 27. Once the regiment arrived at its new camp, the men made themselves as comfortable as possible, received improved rations, and arranged for new clothing to be sent to them, both by the government and by the folks at home. Private Thompson described life during these first days back in camp: “we are camped in the woods without any tents living on beef and bread made up without anything but water though we do very well on that.”<sup>255</sup> After marching on a daily basis for the better part of a month and fighting a major battle, many in the regiment were

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<sup>253</sup> Joseph C. Webb, Winchester, Virginia, to an unknown friend, Hillsborough, North Carolina, October 9, 1862, Cooke Family Papers, The Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>254</sup> David Thompson, Martinsburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, September 23, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>255</sup> David Thompson, Winchester, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, October 2, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

reduced to wearing ragged and dirty uniforms and underclothing, to say nothing of the lack of shoes. To alleviate these shortages, “Capt. White, our Quarter Master is going to start for Raleigh tomorrow after clothing for the regiment.” By this stage in the war, the commutation system had been abandoned and the government of North Carolina had taken direct responsibility for clothing its own troops. In this way, through state officials, the quartermaster of the regiment, Captain Joshua W. White, located and acquired new uniforms and shoes for the men of the Twenty-Seventh. Thompson went on to say that, “Capt. Webb told all the company this morning that if they wanted anything from home to write [for it].” Since the start of the war, the troops had relied on the folks at home for additional supplies of clothing, particularly underclothing. Now, with the regiment in dire need, the men again asked for and received numerous essentials from home. Private Thompson asked for a “3 or 4 pairs of socks, one shirt, and two pairs of drawers,” while Lieutenant Graham likewise wrote for his mother to send him “two or three pairs of yarn socks, two prs of drawers, and two undershirts.” By this combination of government issued uniforms and additional clothing from home, the men were eventually re-supplied, although many would have to wait until early December to receive all that they needed.<sup>256</sup>

In the weeks following the battle of Sharpsburg, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina was fairly quickly brought back up to a reasonable strength. This near miracle, considering the heavy losses suffered by the regiment, was brought about through the

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<sup>256</sup> David Thompson, Winchester, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, October 9, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 134; Clark, 437.

return of the slightly wounded as well as those sick who been left behind in Richmond and Petersburg when the regiment moved north in late August. These returning soldiers, in addition to a slow trickle of new recruits and conscripts, helped to boost the strength of many companies back up to an adequate level. Lieutenant Graham of Company G, writing less than two weeks after the battle, in which only five men of the company emerged unhurt, stated “several of our wounded have since returned to duty—as they were only slightly wounded and a good many of our sick having gotten well and come in [.] we now number 45.” Private Thompson also commented on the matter, “nearly all of our sick boys have got back to the Reg. that we left at Petersburg.” It is reasonable to assume that as October continued and additional soldiers returned to the ranks, the regiment was boosted back up to a respectable strength, possibly over 300 men, in less than a month’s time.<sup>257</sup>

For the more seriously wounded of the regiment, Assistant Surgeon Leander Hunt, with some assistance from the members of the regimental band, was initially the only physician available to the Twenty-Seventh, the surgeon then being on furlough.<sup>258</sup> Hunt vented his frustration at being left alone in a letter to his sister, “I think I will get a furlough next month if the Surgeon of the Regt. gets back this month. I have been with

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<sup>257</sup> Wagstaff, 132; David Thompson, Winchester, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, October 2, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>258</sup> It is unclear which regimental Surgeon this refers to, both Dr. Hector Turner and William A. Holt are listed as possibly being attached to the regiment during this time, although until early November, when E. Lloyd Howard was given the position, it is not known who was actually on duty.

the Regt. alone ever since the fight at Sharpsburg.”<sup>259</sup> Despite this initial lack of care, the situation for many of the severely wounded improved greatly once they were transferred from Winchester to more accommodating hospitals in Staunton and Richmond in the weeks after the battle. In addition, those men who had been wounded and captured by the enemy on the battlefield were paroled by their captors as soon as possible and quickly followed their comrades to Confederate hospitals. Private Thompson referred to the condition of the wounded in his company in a letter to his mother: “they [the captured wounded] said that they fairs well or was treated well by the yankey surgeons, the rest of our wounded is at Winchester if they haven’t been sent on towards Richmond they will get furloughs.”<sup>260</sup> By the middle of October, therefore, most of the wounded from the regiment had either rejoined the ranks, been sent on to permanent hospitals, or received furloughs allowing them to recover in the comfort of their own homes.

As the Army of Northern Virginia continued to grow in strength and the temperature dropped by the day, the men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina began wondering where and when the army would move. Some soldiers believed that the regiment would be sent to North Carolina or Richmond for the winter. Assistant Surgeon Hunt wrote, “I think we will move from here soon...I think we will winter near Weldon N.C. although I may be mistaken, ” while Private Thompson wrote his mother, “I don’t know how long we will stay here [Winchester], though not long I hear. I think we will go

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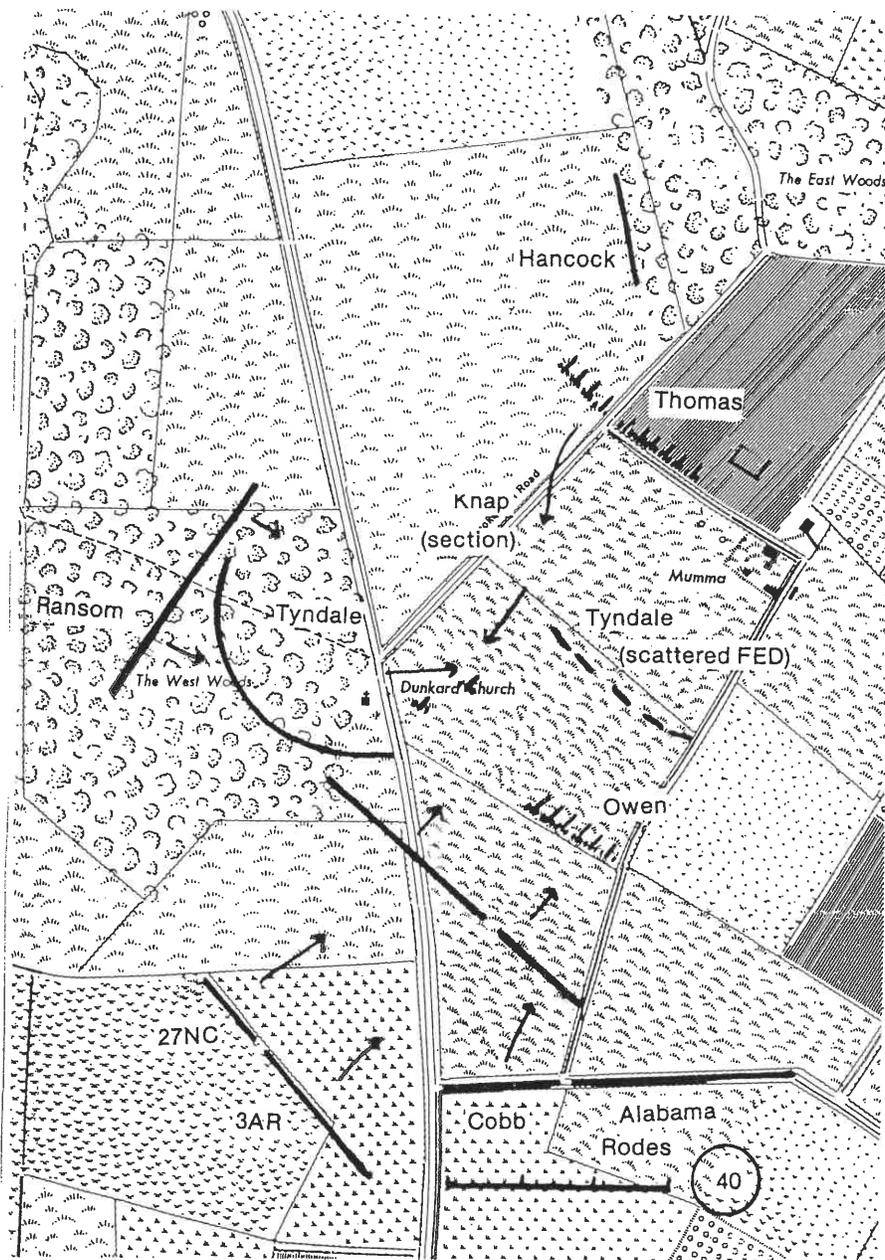
<sup>259</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, near Cedar Mountain, Virginia, to Miss. M.A. Conrad, Panther Creek, North Carolina, November 5, 1862, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

<sup>260</sup> David Thompson, Winchester, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, October 9, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

on towards Richmond before we go into regular camp...Gen. Walker said that he was going to take his men to NC to go into winter quarters. I am in hopes we will.” Others, such as Lieutenant Graham, simply hoped to leave their present position, “The nights are becoming quite cool and we have had several very heavy frosts...this country is cleared of all eatables...I hope to get into winter quarters, but I do not know when that will be.”<sup>261</sup> In reality, the men of the Twenty-Seventh, soon to witness a dramatic change in command, would soon move east towards the town of Fredericksburg to once again confront the Army of the Potomac, now under a new and slightly more aggressive commander.

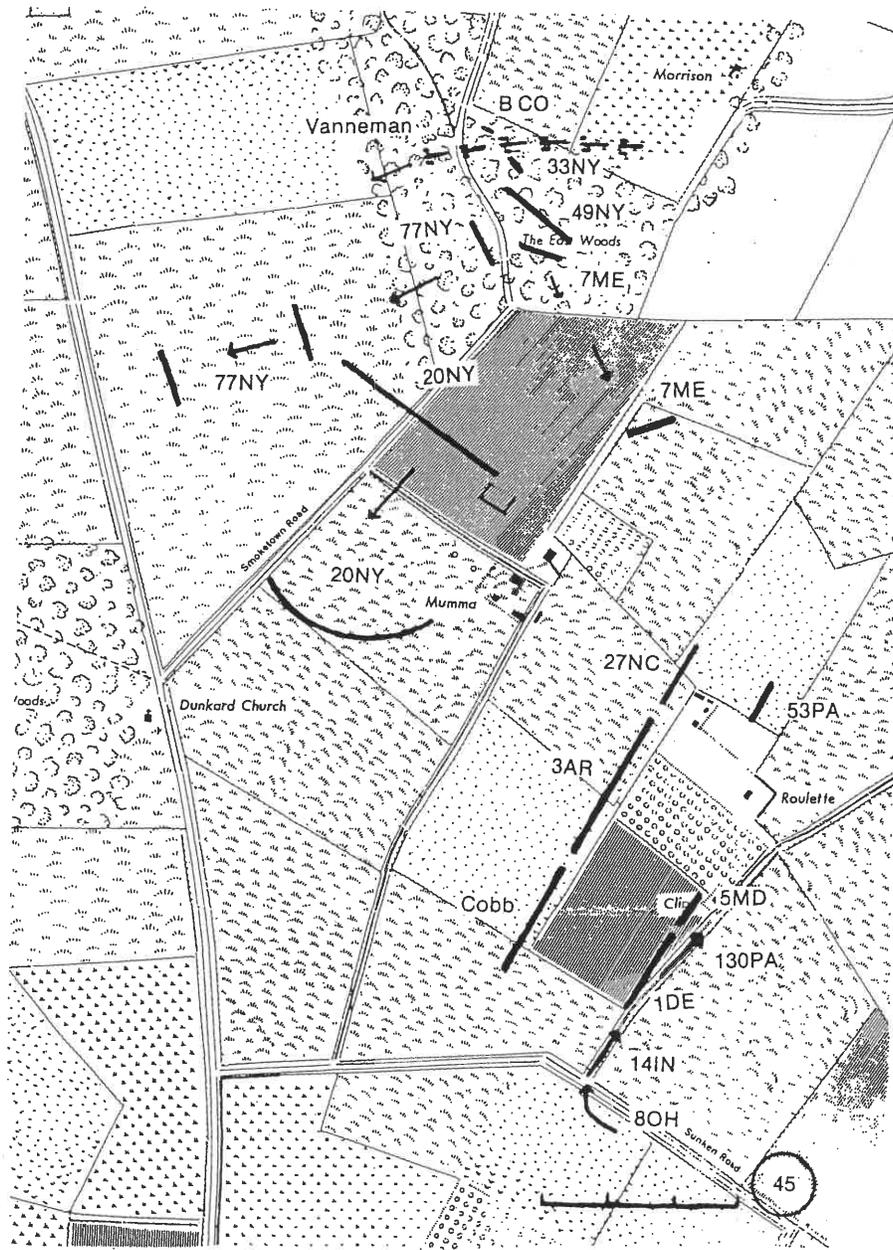
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<sup>261</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, near Cedar Mountain, Virginia, to Miss. M.A. Conrad, Panther Creek, North Carolina, November 5, 1862, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina; David Thompson, Winchester, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, October 2, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 134-35.



The Battle of Sharpsburg, September 17, 1862: Cooke Attacks<sup>262</sup>

<sup>262</sup> Priest, 181.



The Battle of Sharpsburg, September 17, 1862: Cooke is Flanked<sup>263</sup>

<sup>263</sup> Priest, 199.

## Chapter 5—November-December, 1862

**“The men seemed cool and went to work as deliberately as if Genl Lee had hired them by the job.” - Major Joseph Webb<sup>264</sup>**

Following the indecisive battle of Sharpsburg, or Antietam as the North referred to it, and McClellan’s agonizingly slow pursuit of the Army of Northern Virginia, President Lincoln decided to replace the general. His successor as commander of the Army of the Potomac was Major General Ambrose Burnside, the conqueror of New Bern and most recently the commander of the army’s Ninth Corps. Burnside, appointed to his new position on November 7, quickly went on the offensive, aiming to cross the Rappahannock River near Fredericksburg and move on to Richmond before Lee could react.<sup>265</sup>

Meanwhile, Lee’s army was also in motion. Learning of the Union army’s advance south from the Warrenton area, first under McClellan and later Burnside’s direction, but still not sure of its destination, the Confederate commander ordered Longstreet’s First Corps to concentrate at Culpepper Court House, about thirty miles northwest of Fredericksburg. On October 23, Walker’s Division broke camp at Winchester and moved east through the Blue Ridge Mountains, probably utilizing Ashby’s Gap. Captain John Sloan of Company B described the regiment’s movements during the next few days: “After a long but pleasant day’s march, [we] reached the vicinity of Millwood; from thence we journeyed on to Paris, in Loudon County. The next

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<sup>264</sup> Thomas Felix Hickerson, ed., *Echoes of Happy Valley: Letters and Diaries, Family Life in the South, Civil War History*, (Chapel Hill: Thomas Felix Hickerson, 1962), 72.

<sup>265</sup> McPherson, 569-70.

morning we resumed our march...about dark we were halted near the small village of Upperville.” The weather during this time was cold, rainy and windy, forcing the soldiers, who were still without tents, to build large fires at night to ward off the chill. By October 30, the brigade, still commanded by Colonel E. D. Hall of the Forty-Sixth North Carolina, was back in Paris, having participated in a foraging expedition to Alide, procuring “wagon loads of corn and securing a large lot of fine beeves.” According to Lieutenant James Graham, “After spending several days at these places, and making a raid to near Aldie and capturing a lot of fine beef cattle and flour, we moved via Salem, Va., to Culpepper Court House [by November 2].”<sup>266</sup> Private David Thompson, recovered from his slight wound at Sharpsburg, wrote to his sister, “We started from Winchester last Wednesday morning and got to Culpepper C.H. Sunday evening we marched from 15 to 20 miles a day, all of Longstreet’s Corps is here.”<sup>267</sup>

As the Twenty-Seventh made camp outside of Culpepper Court House, the men continued to endure without shelter and a lack of warm clothing. Despite the efforts of Quartermaster White and the folks at home, many soldiers still did not have enough clothes or shoes. With the advent of colder weather, the men would have to make do with what they had until sufficient clothing and footwear arrived. By November 10, Private Thompson of Company G wrote home that the quartermaster and his friend Walt Thompson from home had “brought more than enough of clothes for our company.”

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<sup>266</sup> Sloan, 50-51; Clark, 438.

<sup>267</sup> David Thompson, Culpepper Court House, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, November 4, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Other companies, however, may have had to wait longer for their clothes and shoes to arrive.<sup>268</sup>

On November 4, Walker's Division, under orders from General Longstreet, continued the march south from Culpepper C.H. to Cedar Mountain. Captain Sloan commented, "On the night of the 4<sup>th</sup>, after a tiresome day's march, we went into camp on the top of Cedar Mountain. We were halted on a bleak and barren hill with no fuel within our reach." That night an interesting event occurred involving the Twenty-Seventh's commander. With no firewood available and his men suffering from the cold, "Col. Cooke suspended "special orders" in reference to destroying private property, and gave the men permission to burn the rails from the fences near by. For this necessary disobedience some spiteful person reported him and he was placed in arrest, from which he was released next day without a court martial."<sup>269</sup> The camp on Cedar Mountain was, as Sloan has pointed out, anything but comfortable. Assistant Surgeon Leander Hunt commented on the regiment's location, "It is getting rather cold up here so near the Blue Ridge and it is a hard matter to get anything to eat. This county has been over run with Pope's army and they took every thing they could lay their hands upon."<sup>270</sup>

During this time, as the men suffered from the cold and a lack of clothing and shelter, the command structures of the regiment, the brigade and division were altered significantly. Due in part to his gallant conduct at Sharpsburg, Colonel John R. Cooke,

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid., David Thompson, Madison Court House, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, November 10, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>269</sup> Sloan, 51.

<sup>270</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Cedar Mountain, Virginia, to Miss M.A. Conrad, Panther Creek, North Carolina, November 5, 1862, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

though the junior colonel of the brigade and despite his recent arrest, was promoted to Brigadier General and given command of Manning's Brigade, which would soon be reorganized to contain only North Carolina troops. With Cooke's promotion, command of the regiment devolved upon Lieutenant Colonel Richard Singletary. Although still recovering from wounds received at Sharpsburg, he was promoted to colonel and, at least on paper, commanded the Twenty-Seventh. To fill the newly opened positions of lieutenant colonel and major, the Confederate War Department promoted Major John A. Gilmer to lieutenant colonel while choosing Captain George F. Whitefield of Company C as major; Edward G. Wooten soon replaced Whitefield as commander of the company. At the division level, "Gen. J.G. Walker was transferred to the Mississippi department" and Brigadier General Robert Ransom, the regiment's former brigade commander, was given command of the division.<sup>271</sup> Private Thompson commented on the reorganization in a letter to his mother, "We have lost our Col. Cooke, he has been promoted to Brigadier, he has command of our Brigade...Gen. Walker has been sent to Arkansas."<sup>272</sup>

At this point, Lee, still unsure as to Burnside's intentions, kept Jackson's Corps in the Shenandoah Valley and Longstreet's in the Culpepper area. Showing much greater speed than his predecessor, Burnside managed to move his army to Falmouth, across the Rappahannock from Fredericksburg, by November 17. Through a bureaucratic mix-up, however, the pontoon bridges needed to cross the river were slow to arrive. Up to this point, Lee had considered withdrawing his army to the North Anna River, the next

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 52; Jordan and Manarin, 4.

<sup>272</sup> David Thompson, Madison Court House, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, November 10, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

defensible position on the road to Richmond. With Burnside's inability to cross the river quickly, however, Lee changed his mind and ordered Longstreet to concentrate at Fredericksburg and secure a strong defensive position on the hills behind the city.<sup>273</sup>

Meanwhile, on November 8 and 9, as Burnside slogged his way south toward Falmouth and Lee tried to divine his intentions, the Twenty-Seventh, with the rest of Ransom's Division, had moved to Madison Court House, forty miles west of Fredericksburg, and in a position to move to either that place or the North Anna River, depending on the circumstances and Lee's orders. Private Thompson, writing on November 10, commented on the movement and the harsh weather conditions, "We came from Culpepper here yesterday. I don't know what the notion is for coming over here. It has commenced snowing already, we had a snow 3 inches deep...it don't look very much like we are going to get into winter quarters at all [but] it is cold enough now for us to be in houses or tents or something of the sort."<sup>274</sup> Despite the men's wishes to go into winter quarters, more marching and fighting would fill the days of their immediate future.

Once Burnside's target and his inability to cross the river became apparent, Ransom's Division was ordered to proceed from Madison Court House to Fredericksburg as quickly as possible. The remainder of Longstreet's Corps, still encamped near Culpepper, also set out for the beleaguered city. On November 18, the division, including the men of the Twenty-Seventh, began the march to the east. Captain Sloan remembered setting out:

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<sup>273</sup> McPherson, 570-71; Francis Augustin O'Reilly, *The Fredericksburg Campaign: Winter War on the Rappahannock*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 25-37.

<sup>274</sup> David Thompson, Madison Court House, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, November 10, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

In the morning our division received marching orders, and we set out for Fredericksburg. The weather was very cold, and our march was made through rain and sleet; the ground was frozen, and some of our men being barefooted, their feet cut by the ice, left their bloody tracks along the route. The men, under all these hardships and exposures, were in excellent spirits, and no one escaped their jibes and jokes.<sup>275</sup>

Over the next four days, the regiment continued moving through miserable weather and over roads turned into mud by the constant rain and snow, slowing their march to barely ten miles a day. Passing through Orange Court House and Guinea Station, the men were allowed but little rest from their exertions. Finally, late on November 22, Ransom's Division arrived outside of Fredericksburg in conjunction with McClaw's Division from Culpepper Court House. Burnside had still not received his pontoons and remained on the north side of the river. Upon their arrival, the men of the regiment became aware of the nearness of the enemy and recent developments in the situation. Private Charles Watson of Company G wrote to his parents on the twenty-third, "We have bin on a march ever sense Tuesday, we marched from Madison Court House here in four days, got here last night, there is plenty of yanks here on the other side of the river, heard they demanded surrender of the town but General Lee is not going to surrender it, he will burn it first and when ever they cross the river we will kill them all."<sup>276</sup> The same day, deciding to hold the line of the Rappahannock with his whole army, Lee ordered Jackson's Corps to march from the Shenandoah Valley to the

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<sup>275</sup> Sloan, 53; O'Reilly, *Fredericksburg Campaign*, 33-37.

<sup>276</sup> Charles J. Watson, Fredericksburg, Virginia, to his parents, Orange County, North Carolina, November 23, 1862, Charles J. Watson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Fredericksburg area. As both armies concentrated, it began to look as though a great battle would be fought in the vicinity, and soon.<sup>277</sup>

As Jackson's Corps moved slowly south and east, dealing with the same abysmal weather conditions, Longstreet's troops continued arriving outside of Fredericksburg and began erecting earthworks and gun emplacements along the hills to the south and west of the city. The resulting defensive line, which ran from the banks of the Rappahannock on the left to the tracks of the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad on the right, took advantage of the natural terrain, particularly in the center, where a shoulder height stone wall ran along a sunken section of the Telegraph Road at the base of a prominent ridgeline known as Marye's Heights. Ransom's Division took up position behind this ridgeline and assisted in the work of improving the defenses. Captain Sloan recalled: "On the 23<sup>rd</sup> we reached the vicinity of Fredericksburg, and employed the interval—before the advance made by the enemy on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December—in strengthening our line." The regiment made camp behind the heights, in the shadow of the imposing Marye mansion, but was forced to adjust its location slightly as the supply of firewood ran out. Private Thompson related on November 29, less than a week after arriving: "We moved our camp yesterday, we don't stay more than a week or ten days in one place, it don't take a brigade or a division long to burn the wood on an acre of ground." Thompson went on to describe the position of the brigade: "The regiments are put about 200 yards

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<sup>277</sup> Clark, 438; O'Reilly, 34-40.

apart and each occupies the rear of the line.” In this position, directly opposite the city, the division occupied roughly the center of Longstreet’s defenses.<sup>278</sup>

During the final days of November, while the men of the Twenty-Seventh worked on the defenses and searched daily for firewood, Cooke’s Brigade went through a major reorganization. Lieutenant Graham described the readjustment, which strove to make the brigade a homogenous entity: “the regiments from other States were assigned to brigades from their respective States, viz: the Thirtieth Virginia to Corse’s Brigade [Pickett’s Division] and Third Arkansas to Robertson’s Texas Brigade [Hood’s Division]. The Fifteenth North Carolina, formerly belonging to Cobb’s Brigade [McLaw’s Division], was assigned to our brigade.”<sup>279</sup> Following the reorganization, Cooke’s Brigade was made up of four North Carolina regiments, including the Fifteenth, Twenty-Seventh, Forty-Sixth and Forty-Eighth; the brigade would largely keep this organization for the remainder of the war. With Ransom’s former brigade also made up entirely of North Carolina troops, his division, containing slightly over 4,000 men in eight regiments, was now the only one in the Army of Northern Virginia to be made up of soldiers from a single state.<sup>280</sup>

On December 5, as Jackson’s Corps took up positions guarding the Confederate right, the Twenty-Seventh went through another adjustment in its command structure. Colonel Richard Singletary, still recovering from his wounds, resigned his commission

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<sup>278</sup> Sloan, 54; David Thompson, Fredericksburg, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, November 29, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; O’Reilly, 38-43.

<sup>279</sup> Clark, 438.

<sup>280</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 4; George C. Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 444-46.

by reason of disability. The colonel's departure necessitated an immediate change in command. Lieutenant Colonel John Gilmer was quickly promoted to colonel while Major George Whitefield was advanced to lieutenant colonel. In choosing a new major for the regiment, Captain Joseph C. Webb, having commanded Company G since August 1861, was promoted to the open position. Newly elected Captain James Whitted, only recently exchanged after being captured at Sharpsburg, took command of the company. These three men now commanded the regiment, which, given the continued return of sick and wounded soldiers, probably numbered 400 men or more by early December.<sup>281</sup>

While the regiment's officers shuffled into their new ranks, the men continued strengthening their positions and dealt with the increasingly bad weather. Private, Samuel Lockhart of Company G, writing to his sister on December 7, gave a good description of the lives of the soldiers in the regiment at this time:

It is very disagreeable here today; every thing is frozen up; there has been a snow here, about four inches deep; it is nearly all melted away. I was on provost guard yesterday; it was very bad treading through the snow. Our fare here is very simple. We get crackers and beef to eat, and flour and bacon sometimes. I expect we will all freeze out here this winter if we don't get into winter quarters soon. The company is in very good health, considering every thing.

Other soldiers, such as David Thompson of the same company, barely mentioned the cold or the lack of shelter, focusing instead on the possibility of an upcoming battle and the strong position they now held. "I don't know whether they are expecting a fight here or not," Thompson wrote, "all of our army is here and all or a good portion of the yankee

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<sup>281</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-8, 61-62; in estimating the size of the regiment at this time, the author took an educated guess predicated upon the continued return of slightly wounded and sick soldiers as well as the fact that Ransom's Division numbered over 4,000 men by this time, having only eight regiments in the division, the average regiment should have numbered nearly 500 men, therefore the 400 number is a fairly conservative estimate.

army [is] on the other side of the river, if they cross the river they will be apt to catch a thrashing for we would have decidedly the advantage.”<sup>282</sup>

The advantage of position did indeed rest with the Army of Northern Virginia, which now numbered nearly 80,000 men. However, General Burnside, with 120,000 troops divided into three Grand Divisions and the United States government clamoring for action behind his back, could not sit still and allow the Confederate army to block his passage to Richmond, thereby forcing him into a winter stalemate. Failing to locate a position from which the army could safely cross the Rappahannock above or below Fredericksburg and flank Lee out of his defenses, Burnside had little choice but to cross directly into the city and attack the Confederates head on. With this new plan, Lee’s army, not Richmond, became the Federals’ main concern. If Burnside could defeat the Confederate army with a successful attack, the capture of Richmond would necessarily follow. With the arrival of his pontoon bridges, the Union commander made plans to cross his army to the south bank of the river on December 11. Meanwhile, Lee had also been busy shoring up his defenses and blocking any potential Union crossing points.<sup>283</sup>

On the morning of the eleventh, as Burnside’s engineers began laying the pontoons across the river, Confederate troops in Fredericksburg, largely from Barksdale’s Mississippi Brigade, began the battle by firing on the Union work details. The Federals responded by shelling the city with a massive artillery bombardment followed by an

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<sup>282</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Fredericksburg, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, December 7, 1862, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; David Thompson, Fredericksburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, December 3, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>283</sup> O’Reilly, 7, 37, 50-54.

amphibious attack across the river and into the streets of Fredericksburg to drive the defenders out. While this urban battle unfolded, the Twenty-Seventh, and the remainder of Ransom's Division, was largely idle. Major Joseph Webb recalled the movements of the regiment during the day: "Shortly after daylight we were marched in the direction of Fredericksburg where we could hear the doleful sound of the Enemy's Artillery battering down the city. We were marched with one whole division [Ransom's] to within a half mile of the city and drawn up in line of battle, where we remained about two hours and then were countermarched back to the Telegraph Road."<sup>284</sup> Upon reaching Marye's Heights once again, the division remained in place for the remainder of the day. Relegated to spectators, the regiment bivouacked along the ridge, which allowed them a bird's eye view of the unfolding action.<sup>285</sup>

By the end of the day, the Federals had secured Fredericksburg, largely sacking the town, and succeeded in laying a total of six pontoon bridges from the northern part of the city downstream to Deep Run, allowing the majority of the Army of the Potomac to cross the river throughout the night and the next morning. By the evening of December 12, Burnside's army was in position and awaiting orders to attack. Come daylight, the Union Left Grand Division, under Major General William Franklin, would attack the Confederate right, thereby cutting Lee's army in two. On the right, meanwhile, Major General Edwin Sumner's Right Grand Division would make a demonstration against Longstreet's troops along Marye's Heights, hopefully making a lodgment in the Confederate defenses in the process. Lee, seeing that the main Federal attack would

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<sup>284</sup> Hickerson, *Echoes of Happy Valley*, 71.

<sup>285</sup> O'Reilly, 57-102.

likely fall on his weaker right flank, ordered Jackson to concentrate his dispersed divisions near Prospect Hill and Hamilton's Crossing. For the men of the Twenty-Seventh, now positioned once again behind the heights, "we all laid down to sleep with the full conviction that next day would come the shock of battle."<sup>286</sup>

December 13, according to Major Webb, dawned "gloomy and foggy. Everything seemed quiet until about 9 o'clock when all of a sudden a furious cannonading and rattling of musketry commenced away on our right down the river."<sup>287</sup> The sounds that greeted the men of the regiment this morning heralded the beginning of the Battle of Fredericksburg. On the Union left, after a delay of several hours due in large part to poor staff work and Burnside's tardiness in sending out orders, General Franklin initiated his attack with an impressive artillery bombardment of Jackson's lines. Instead of utilizing his entire force of two corps, Franklin, reacting to unclear and confusing orders from Burnside, attacked "Stonewall" Jackson's position on Prospect Hill with only two divisions. This mistake removed almost any chance for a Union victory on this day. Despite breaking through the lines of A.P. Hill's Division, the Federal attackers could not resist Jackson's counterattack, which swept them off the hill and back across the open fields over which they had previously advanced. By 2:00 p.m. the action on the Confederate right was over. What was supposed to have been the main Union attack of the day had ended in complete failure. On the Union right, meanwhile, Sumner's diversion, originally designed only to keep the Confederate left occupied while Franklin

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<sup>286</sup> Hickerson, 71; O'Reilly, 102-3.

<sup>287</sup> Hickerson, 71.

made his attack, had taken on the characteristics of a full-scale assault against Longstreet's lines.<sup>288</sup>

Captain John Sloan, in his postwar history of Company B, described the position occupied by Cooke's Brigade during the morning hours of December 13:

At the foot of Marye's Hill ran the Telegraph Road, along which, for some four hundred yards, is a stone revetment. On the crest of the hill, at intervals, in pits, were posted nine guns of the Washington artillery. Three regiments of Cobb's Brigade were in position behind this stonewall at the foot of the hill. Some two hundred yards in a ravine [behind the wall], and immediately behind the Washington artillery, lay our (Cooke's) brigade.<sup>289</sup>

In this position, with the Twenty-Seventh resting on the right of the brigade, Cooke's men listened to the developing battle in front of them and awaited the order to go into action. Soon they would receive orders to move forward to the support of Cobb's Brigade and the artillery, which were now being hard pressed by elements of the Union Second Corps.<sup>290</sup>

A little before noon, following an intense skirmish and artillery exchange for possession of the canal ditch that ran across the fields between Fredericksburg and Marye's Heights, Sumner's men began their attack. The Union Second Corps, commanded by General Darius Couch, was the first unit to be sent into the assault. The lead division, led by Brigadier General William French, advanced across the fields and struggled over the ditch only to be buffeted by heavy artillery and musketry fire from the Confederate defenses, suffering particularly heavy casualties from Cobb's rapid fire from behind the stone wall. During this firefight, under Ransom's direction, and in order to

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<sup>288</sup> O'Reilly, 135-245.

<sup>289</sup> Sloan, 55.

<sup>290</sup> O'Reilly, 246-58; U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 21, 629.

support Cobb, “Cooke’s Brigade was ordered to occupy the crest of Marye’s Hill, which was done in fine style.”<sup>291</sup> Major Webb remembered the movement of the Twenty-Seventh, “After General Cooke had given us some directions about where to go, he said, “Now, men, I want you to do this prettily; go on.” Off we went across an open field in the direction of the batteries of the Washington Artillery...the Reg moved in as steady and straight a line as I ever saw it on drill.” Upon their arrival slightly above the artillery, Cooke’s men lined up on top of the crest and fired several volleys down into the Federals now stuck in front of the stone wall, unable to continue the advance. Despite the brigade’s commanding position, however, the top of the hill was devoid of cover. The men were therefore ordered to lie down in order to avoid unnecessary casualties.<sup>292</sup>

Realizing the protection offered by the sunken road and its stone revetment, Colonel Gilmer, apparently on his own authority, waited only a few moments before ordering the regiment to move quickly forward, down the steep hillside and into the road. According to Major Webb: “Below the artillery we could see the stone fence behind which we were directed to go. Then the artillerists began to throw up their hats and cheer us, and, as if by intuition, the whole regt set up a yell and set off at the double quick to the bottom of the hill.”<sup>293</sup> Captain Sloan also described the change of position: “our regiment, in the midst of a terrific fire, passed rapidly through the Washington artillery, and double-quickened down the steep incline into the Telegraph Road and joined in the fire.”<sup>294</sup> During the descent, Colonel Gilmer was wounded in the thigh but managed to

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<sup>291</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 21, 625.

<sup>292</sup> Hickerson, 71-72; O’Reilly, 246-59.

<sup>293</sup> Hickerson, 72.

<sup>294</sup> Sloan, 55.

keep up with the regiment until it got into the road. Major Webb was also hit in the wrist but, as he related, “it hurt my coat worse than it did me.” Indeed, most of the regiment’s casualties this day occurred during its charge down into the sunken road. Private Thompson, who was himself wounded by a spent bullet during the movement, recalled: “our reg. was exposed more on the hill than any other place, after they got over the hill they happened to get behind a rock wall where they were very little exposed, except to the shelling.”<sup>295</sup> Upon the regiment’s arrival on the right end of the stone wall, near the Hall house, the men quickly mingled with elements of Cobb’s Georgia Brigade and commenced firing into the ranks of French’s Division. One unidentified soldier was not content to take cover, but actually climbed onto the wall and fired, at the same time shouting derisively at the Federals before jumping back down into the road. Unable to withstand this punishing fire or continue forward, French ordered his men back to the cover of a swale several hundred yards in front of the stone wall from which they kept up a steady fire upon the Confederate defenders.<sup>296</sup>

With French’s attack stalled, Couch sent word for Brigadier General Winfield Hancock’s Division to continue the assault. About this time, perhaps 1:00 p.m., General Cooke traveled down into the sunken road to talk with General Cobb about the possibility of bringing his whole brigade into position behind the stone wall. What happened next was described by one of Cooke’s staff officers, H. A. Butler: “While Gen. Cobb, his assistant adjutant general, Capt. Brewster, Gen. Cooke, and I were together a Minnie ball

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<sup>295</sup> Hickerson, 72; David Thompson, Fredericksburg, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, December 21, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>296</sup> O’Reilly, 259-75.

struck Gen. Cooke a glancing shot on the forehead, breaking the skull. At the same moment Gen. Cobb and Capt. Brewster also fell.”<sup>297</sup> Amazingly, Cooke would survive this ugly wound, eventually returning to command of his brigade. Cobb, on the other hand, wounded severely in the leg, died shortly thereafter. With Cooke out of action, Colonel Edward Hall of the Forty-Sixth North Carolina took temporary command of the brigade. Despite the cover offered by the sunken road, Cooke’s three remaining regiments remained exposed on top of the hill.<sup>298</sup>

Hancock’s three brigades, including the legendary Irish Brigade, took largely the same course that French’s men had tried earlier and suffered the same inevitable results. Hit first by accurate Confederate artillery fire, the Federals got closer to the wall only to be decimated by massed infantry fire delivered by Cobb’s men, now reinforced by the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina. The troops in the sunken road, as mentioned earlier, were almost entirely protected from enemy musket fire while the Federals were almost totally exposed. From this cover, the men of the regiment loaded and fired in a deliberate fashion, using a relay system in order to keep up an impressive rate of fire. According to Major Webb, “The men seemed cool and went to work as deliberately as if Genl Lee had hired them by the job.” Facing this fire, Hancock’s men wavered and then broke, many of them joining their comrades behind the sheltering lips of the swale. Without mincing words, Captain Sloan simply stated: “Hancock was repulsed with terrible slaughter.”<sup>299</sup>

At this time, the Forty-Sixth North Carolina, given an opening, descended the incline and

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<sup>297</sup> S.A. Cunningham, ed., “Fredericksburg—Personal Reminiscences,” *Confederate Veteran*, Vol. XIV, April 1906, (Nashville: S.A. Cunningham, 1906), 181.

<sup>298</sup> O’Reilly, 293-97.

<sup>299</sup> Hickerson, 72; Sloan, 56.

joined the Twenty-Seventh at the stone wall. Colonel Hall summed up these developments in his report: "After the repulse of the enemy, the Forty-sixth was moved down the hill behind the fence, supporting Cobb's Brigade, the Twenty-seventh and Forty-sixth remaining behind the fence, and the Forty-eighth and Fifteenth on the top of the hill all day."<sup>300</sup> Incredibly, despite the carnage already inflicted on the Federal attackers in front of Marye's Heights, the day and the battle was far from over.

Initially intended to be nothing more than a feint, Sumner's assault against the heights had resulted in the battering of two divisions. Burnside, still hoping that Franklin would reinforce his earlier success on the Union left, continued ordering in divisions from his right against Longstreet's lines to keep up the diversion. In addition, the battle on the Confederate left had largely taken on a life of its own. The Union command began to believe that if Sumner's men showed any signs of weakness the Confederates could launch a counterattack and sweep them into the river. Therefore, despite the slaughter, Sumner continued sending his men forward, hoping against hope that perhaps a breakthrough could be achieved after all. Lee was also concerned by the mounting pressure being applied against the sunken road; to keep his lines from being overwhelmed by simple weight of numbers, he ordered Longstreet to reinforce Cobb and Cooke's men at the stone wall. Meanwhile, as the time approached 2:00 p.m., the final division of the Union Second Corps, under Oliver Howard, as well as Sturgis' Division of the Ninth Corps, began their advance. Captain Sloan, directing the fire of Company B, wrote of the attack, "The enemy now made his third effort, advancing bravely to the

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<sup>300</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 21, 629-30; O'Reilly, 297-323.

desperate work assigned them. We took a heavy toll from their columns, and, like their predecessors, they fell back in confusion.”<sup>301</sup>

Throughout the remainder of the afternoon the Union attacks continued, eventually involving elements of at least seven divisions from four different corps. Through it all, the men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina remained in their position behind the stone wall, keeping up a rapid and effective fire upon the enemy. With such heavy and continuous firing, the men began running out of ammunition. Hearing of this problem, General Ransom quickly re-supplied the men in the road from his reserve wagons. At one point during the fighting, Ransom, whose other brigade fought largely without cover on top of the heights, sent his “adjutant-general to the road to ascertain the condition of the troops and the amount of ammunition on hand. His report was truly gratifying, representing the men in highest spirits and an abundance of ammunition.”<sup>302</sup> During the height of Howard’s attack, pursuant to Lee’s orders, Kershaw’s Brigade of South Carolinians was rushed to the front to support the troops behind the wall. Later in the afternoon, fresh guns and men from Longstreet’s artillery reserve replaced the Washington Artillery, which had performed brilliantly in helping to repulse each Union attack. In addition, elements of Kemper’s Brigade from Pickett’s Division also took up positions in the sunken road, jamming it full of troops, perhaps six ranks deep, and making the position even stronger.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Sloan, 56; O’Reilly, 324-55.

<sup>302</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol., 21*, 626; Although not mentioned by the participants, the men of the 27<sup>th</sup> NC, firing what must have been well over 100 rounds, were surely forced to clean their fouled weapons at least once during the day, most likely simply doing so behind the firing line with water from canteens.

<sup>303</sup> O’Reilly, 324-88.

As the assaults continued like clockwork against an ever increasing Confederate force, Colonel Hall recalled the results: “Six different times during the day did the enemy advance his heavily reinforced columns, and each time was driven back with immense loss.”<sup>304</sup> In describing one of the final attacks against the stone wall, launched around 5:00 p.m., Captain Sloan wrote, “Lastly came the sixth and final assault by Humphrey’s Division, Hooker’s Corps, and charge it did, as game as death. They, too, had to bite the dust, and their broken and shattered columns fled in disorder to the city, leaving the field strewn with their slain.”<sup>305</sup> Incredibly, even after the sun went down and visibility became almost nil, one more assault, actually no more than an attempt to cover the Federal withdrawal, was launched. Major Webb, still pacing behind the ranks of the Twenty-Seventh, described this last attack:

Their last charge was made about 20 minutes after dark (as we afterwards learned by Sykes’ Regulars). After they formed and started, they set up a most terrible yell; and our men by way of expressing their contempt for them set up a counter yell which completely drowned their racket; but still they came on. We could not see them; but Col. Ruff of the 18<sup>th</sup> Ga. Regt. had a good glass by which he could see them, and he told the men when and where to fire; and at the fist volley they broke and ran.<sup>306</sup>

With darkness enveloping the field and the final repulse of the Federal right wing, the Union attacks against Marye’s Heights came to an end, though thousands of Union troops remained stranded in the fields and behind the swale in front of the stone wall.<sup>307</sup>

As the cries of Federal wounded pierced the cold night air, the Twenty-Seventh was withdrawn back to the rear of Marye’s Heights. Colonel Hall described the rearward

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<sup>304</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol., 21, 630.

<sup>305</sup> Sloan, 56.

<sup>306</sup> Hickerson, 72.

<sup>307</sup> O’Reilly, 389-422.

movement of the brigade and his satisfaction with the men's performance: "The action ceased at night, when the brigade was withdrawn, and resumed the position they occupied previous to the action. It gives me great pleasure to state that, without exception, the conduct of the different regiments composing the brigade was deserving of the most unqualified approbation." Once back in the ravine behind the artillery positions, the men of the regiment, exhausted with sore shoulders and lips black from tearing open hundreds of cartridges, remained in line with muskets in hand, ready for a renewal of the battle at any time. According to Captain Sloan, "We remained in line of battle during the night, expecting and hoping for a renewal of the assault on the next day. The 14<sup>th</sup> (Sunday) came, however, and went away without a renewal."<sup>308</sup>

While men from South Carolina and Virginia held the stone wall, trading fire with Federal sharpshooters, Cooke's Brigade remained in its original position all day on the fourteenth. Looking for a renewal of the battle during the day, General Burnside was finally begged off by his subordinates. Robert E. Lee, despite holding his ground the day before, also looked for a way to strike the enemy. Ultimately, however, plans for a Confederate counterattack were dropped on account of the superiority of Federal artillery on the heights across the river. After suffering a stinging defeat and with no other option left to him, Burnside gave orders for his army to retreat on the evening of December 15. While the Confederates held their ground and the Union army pulled back, the men of the regiment, according to John Sloan, "were moved a few hundred yards farther to our left, and remained in this position until the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>, when it was discovered that

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<sup>308</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 21*, 630; Sloan, 56.

the enemy, availing himself of the darkness of night, had re-crossed the river.”<sup>309</sup> With Burnside’s retreat, the Battle of Fredericksburg had ended in a resounding Confederate victory. Once more the outnumbered Army of Northern Virginia had bested its more numerous foe and inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy. Total Federal losses neared 13,000 men, while Confederate casualties numbered fewer than 5,000.<sup>310</sup> In describing the field in front of the regiment’s former position, one soldier in the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina commented, “I could have walked without touching the ground a half mile on dead yankees.” Such was the destruction inflicted by the defenders of Marye’s Heights.<sup>311</sup>

Ensnared behind the protection of the stone wall for much of the battle, the Twenty-Seventh had played an important role in holding the defensive position in the face of repeated enemy attacks. In addition, the rapid fire put out by the men of the regiment inflicted heavy casualties on the Union attackers, thereby helping to stop each attack cold in front of the formidable position. If the soldiers of the regiment wished any revenge on their enemy for the fearful losses they had suffered at Sharpsburg, they had gotten it. In return for shooting down an untold number of Federals, possibly several hundred, the Twenty-Seventh suffered thirty-three casualties, only four of whom were killed or mortally wounded. With the exception of Company C, which lost eight men during the battle, each company had suffered very lightly, especially compared to the

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<sup>309</sup> Sloan, 56-57; Despite the confirmed presence of the Aurora Borealis above the battlefield that night, the author found no mention of the phenomenon among the surviving letters and diaries of soldiers in the regiment.

<sup>310</sup> O’Reilly, 422-99.

<sup>311</sup> David Thompson, Petersburg, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, January 14, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

bloodbath of Sharpsburg. Most the regiment's casualties, as previously mentioned, occurred during their descent into the road from the crest of Marye's Heights. It was during this movement that Colonel Gilmer had fallen with a severe wound to his thigh. Despite the severity of the wound however, Gilmer would return to command in less than three months. In the meantime, Lieutenant Colonel Whitfield led the regiment. Compared with the other regiments of Cooke's Brigade, the Twenty-Seventh had gotten off lightly. The Forty-Eighth, which fought without cover on the top of the heights, suffered more than 175 casualties during the day. In the end, Colonel Gilmer's unauthorized move down into the Telegraph Road had saved his men unnecessary losses and, at the same time, materially aided in the defeat of the enemy. The wounding of Brigadier General Cooke had been a shock to the men of his brigade. Despite first appearances, however, Cooke, like Gilmer, would not only survive his wound but return to his position in a short time, resuming command of the brigade by the middle of February. Until that time, Colonel Hall of the Forty-Sixth remained at its head.<sup>312</sup>

By the afternoon of the sixteenth, as Confederate troops re-occupied Fredericksburg and the remaining wounded of both sides were brought in, Cooke's Brigade, presumably in company with the remainder of Ransom's Division, had been relieved by General Jenkins Brigade of South Carolinians and moved to the extreme right of the Confederate line. Arriving near Hamilton's Crossing late in the day, the men of

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<sup>312</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98; U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 21, 559-629; David Thompson, Petersburg, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, January 14, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; David Thompson, Coosawhatchie, South Carolina, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, March 7, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

the regiment, after four nights of remaining in battle readiness, were finally able to go into a more permanent bivouac and get some much needed and well-deserved rest.<sup>313</sup>

Once in camp, the men made themselves as comfortable as possible and, through letters, regaled those at home of the regiment's role in the recent battle. David Thompson, who had missed most of the action due to a slight wound received while descending the heights, wrote his sister, "they certainly mowed the yankees in front of them, the yankees made four or five efforts to charge them from their position but failed every time...they had to give it up as a bad idea and recrossed the river." Assistant Surgeon Leander Hunt, helping to mend the wounded, remarked, "The enemy advanced in large force and we drove them with but little loss on side...our Regt. was in the whole fight but we suffered little...I tell you we had warm times for a while but we drove the rascals back over the river."<sup>314</sup> Another topic of concern to several in the regiment was the apparent lack of recognition given to North Carolina troops following the battle. Writing to his Aunt, Major Webb commented, "We have not been mentioned in any of the papers I have seen. On the contrary, Ga. and S.C. get all the credit. It is true they fought well and did their part nobly, but it is very discouraging to troops to fight as the N.C. Brigade in defending Marye's Hill and then see the troops of other states wearing all the laurels."<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 21, 630; Sloan, 57-58.

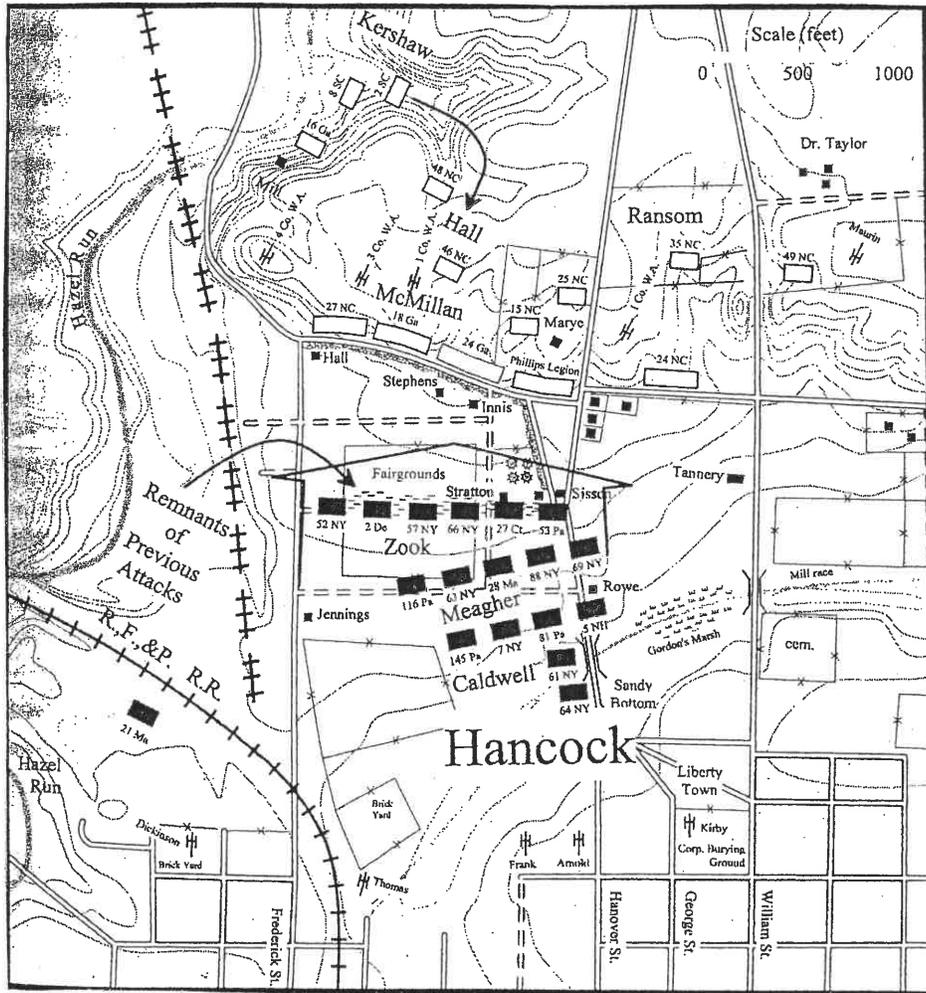
<sup>314</sup> David Thompson, Fredericksburg, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, December 21, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Leander Gwynn Hunt, Fredericksburg, Virginia, to Miss M.A. Conrad, Clemmons ville, North Carolina, December 18, 1862, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

<sup>315</sup> Hickerson, 72.

In the days following the battle, as Burnside still attempted to put together another offensive plan and the Army of Northern Virginia prepared to go into winter quarters, the men of the Twenty-Seventh finally received shelter from the wet and cold. It is unclear exactly how many tents arrived for the regiment's use, but apparently enough A or wedge style tents were available to make at least some of the soldiers comfortable. Private Thompson proudly described his new shelter to his sister Mary, "I have a small tent to stay in, I and five others we have a chimney built to it." With Christmas coming up, many soldiers sent letters home asking for special presents of food or clothing. In the same letter just quoted, Thompson hoped that the "sausage, souse and honey" from home would arrive in time, adding that with these delicacies they would "have a fine mess" for the holiday. With temporary shelter from the elements soon to be augmented by permanent winter quarters, the men of the regiment, and all of Ransom's Division, looked forward to a long and uneventful winter's rest. Events elsewhere in the Confederacy, however, would soon undo these plans. On January 3, 1863, according to Captain Sloan, "we were ordered to hold ourselves in readiness to march, and about 10 o'clock we were on the road leading towards Richmond." Their ultimate destination remained a mystery as the men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina trudged south through the cold and toward an uncertain future.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> David Thompson, Fredericksburg, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, December 21, 1862, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Sloan, 58.



The Battle of Fredericksburg, December 13, 1862: Hancock's Attack<sup>317</sup>

<sup>317</sup> O'Reilly, 305.

## Chapter 6—January-May, 1863

**“You ought have heard our Regiment when we got on the cars at Petersburg; they were all so glad we were coming to the good old North State.”**

**- Private Samuel Lockhart, Company G<sup>318</sup>**

On the evening of January 3, 1863, after marching some fifteen miles during the day, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, along with the rest of Ransom’s Division, made camp along Telegraph Road south of Fredericksburg. As they continued the march south during the next several days, passing through Caroline and Hanover counties, the men of the regiment came to realize that their initial destination was Richmond. According to Captain Sloan, “We arrived at Richmond on the 6<sup>th</sup>, passed through the city and made camp on the Richmond and Petersburg Turnpike.” As he passed through the Confederate capital, Private David Thompson remembered seeing Brigadier General Cooke, whose condition was rapidly improving, “I saw him as we came through...he will soon be well enough to take command of the brigade.” Continuing on to Petersburg on the seventh, the men would remain in the vicinity for a week. Writing to his mother on January 9, Second Lieutenant James Graham of Company G, related, “We reached this place day before yesterday evening pretty well tired down, having marched from Fredericksburg in four days and a half. Where we will go from here or what we will do I do not know, but it is pretty generally supposed that we will go to North Carolina.”<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Goldsboro, North Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, January 18, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>319</sup> Sloan, 58; David Thompson, Petersburg, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, January 14, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 135-36.

As the regiment made camp outside of Petersburg, the soldiers queried each other and their officers about their eventual destination. Nearly all agreed that they were probably headed for North Carolina. Private Thompson described the new campsite and its attractions to his sister: “This is the most abominable camp that we have ever been at, we have nothing but pine wood to burn; one good thing about it is that there is a still house here if we could only get to it, but they keep a guard around it.” Disgruntled at being kept away from possible libations, the men of the regiment were happily surprised on January 13 when, for the first time during their enlistment, they were issued a small ration of whiskey. Whether this unusual occurrence had anything to do with their complaints is unclear. The issue may have been given simply to keep the soldiers in good spirits following the hard marching and cold weather of the previous week.<sup>320</sup>

January 15 saw the various regiments of Ransom’s Division boarding the cars of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad. The Twenty-Seventh, or at least several companies of the regiment, was apparently accommodated on passenger cars, which had recently been impressed by Confederate authorities for transporting troops. After boarding the trains and heading south, the men of the regiment were relieved to finally be sure of their destination. Private Samuel Lockhart of Company G, writing to his sister, described the moment, “You ought have heard our Regiment when we got on the cars at Petersburg; they were all so glad we were coming to the good old North State. When we left Petersburg we sang the Good Old North State, and then we sang the songs of Zion

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<sup>320</sup> David Thompson, Petersburg, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, January 14, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

until we all fell asleep in our seats.”<sup>321</sup> The men of the Twenty-Seventh who were now returning to North Carolina were not only in excellent spirits, but were nearly all well clad and equipped, thanks in part to the fight at Fredericksburg. Private Thompson wrote home describing his recent acquisitions, “the gun that I have was taken at Harper’s Ferry. I have a canteen and haversack that I got at Fredericksburg...I could have gotten almost anything I wanted.”<sup>322</sup>

On the evening of the sixteenth, Cooke’s Brigade, still temporarily commanded by Colonel Hall, arrived in Goldsboro, where the troops, happy to finally be back in North Carolina, disembarked from the trains and, after marching several miles, made camp north of the city.<sup>323</sup> The next day, the men were roused from their simple bivouac, for tents had not arrived yet, and marched about two miles south of the city, where they went into a new camp upon the recent battlefield. In early December, in conjunction with Burnside’s attack at Fredericksburg, Union General John G. Foster, commanding Federal forces at New Bern and Beaufort, launched a raid through much of central eastern North Carolina, intent on destroying the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad Bridge over the Neuse River below Goldsboro. Despite repeated Confederate attempts to block his progress, Foster succeeded in burning the bridge and defeated a small Confederate force south of the river. It was this battlefield upon which the men of the Twenty-Seventh now slept. Ironically, Foster’s raiders had marched through the region, from which five

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<sup>321</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Goldsboro, North Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, January 18, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>322</sup> David Thompson, Petersburg, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, January 19, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>323</sup> Sloan, 59.

companies of the regiment had originated, at nearly the same time that its citizen soldiers were mowing down Federals by the score in front of the stone wall at Fredericksburg. Besides its bloody past, the campsite had other drawbacks. According to Assistant Surgeon Leander Hunt, “We have a very bad camp at present here in the swamps and on a lone sand hill...it is very cold down here and we are without our cooking utensils and it is rather bad getting something to eat.”<sup>324</sup>

Luckily for the troops, they would not remain long in this position. By January 19, the regiment was once again on the move. Boarding the cars of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad once again, Cooke’s Brigade traveled south to near Kenansville before disembarking and beginning a march to the southwest. Captain Sloan described these movements: “The 19<sup>th</sup> found us on the outskirts of the straggling little village of Kenansville; thence onward, we marched through a sparsely-settled country to South Washington, where we remained until the 1<sup>st</sup> of February.” Sometime during these movements, Ransom’s Division was broken up. The general took command of his former brigade, which remained near Kenansville, while Cooke’s Brigade was encamped at South Washington. Both brigades were now individually attached to the Department of North Carolina and Southern Virginia, commanded by Major General Samuel G. French.<sup>325</sup>

The reason for all this movement and activity, in what seemed a quiet sector, had much to do with Federal movements along the coast of the Carolinas during the month of

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<sup>324</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Goldsboro, North Carolina, to M.A. Conrad, Clemmons, North Carolina, January 18, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina; Barrett, 145-47.

<sup>325</sup> Sloan, 59; Wagstaff, 137-38; Barrett, 149.

January. 1863 had opened with a Union plan to launch a joint land and sea attack against Wilmington. In preparation for the offensive, 12,000 troops were concentrated near New Bern and Beaufort, supported by naval gunboats. Writing to his brother-in-law, General James Ewell Brown Stuart, General Cooke, now recuperating in Goldsboro in order to be near his brigade, described the possibility of a major battle occurring in North Carolina: “The enemy have just begun advancing toward Wilmington, and in the course of a week we will without doubt meet them probably near Kenansville...I hope North Carolina will not be the scene of another defeat...it does seem to me that the same attention is not paid to this portion of the country as to some others.”<sup>326</sup> Despite the promise of this offensive, however, Federal leaders in Washington eventually decided to postpone the attack in favor of reinforcing a major Union operation then being planned against Charleston, South Carolina, set to take place that spring. In addition, there remained the threat of small-scale raids, launched against the interior of North Carolina from Federal bases near New Bern. Reacting to such Union threats, many of them only perceived, along the length of the coastline, Confederate commanders required mobile forces that could be moved to endangered points quickly. Cooke and Ransom’s brigades, positioned near the vital conduit of the railroad to Wilmington, had now become such commands. Before the regiment left Goldsboro, Private Lockhart summarized the common soldier’s knowledge of the situation: “I expect we will go on towards Wilmington [soon]...There are a good

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<sup>326</sup> John R. Cooke, Goldsboro, North Carolina, to J.E.B. Stuart, Fredericksburg, Virginia, January, 1863, Cooke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

many troops about here; I don't know whether there will be any fighting here or not; I hope not."<sup>327</sup>

While Confederate and Federal commanders planned their moves and shuffled troops back and forth across the region, the men of the Twenty-Seventh remained in camp near South Washington. Once again, despite clearer and warmer weather, complaints about the regiment's campsite abounded in letters home. According to Lieutenant Graham, "We are camped in a pine thicket and have to burn pine wood, as any other sort is very scarce about here, and consequently get smoked as black as can be. Sometimes it seems almost impossible to tell whether some of the men are white or black they get smoked so."<sup>328</sup> Graham's complaints were registered on January 30; by February 1, the regiment was once again moved to a new location. Captain Sloan remembered the movement: "From South Washington, we moved about 7 miles eastward to the scattered town of Burgaw." Bivouacked near the tracks of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, the men of the regiment, still without tents, were subjected to heavy rain, short rations, supplemented by a local abundance of sweet potatoes, and an outbreak of sickness. Private Thompson, writing to his mother after being camped at Burgaw for two weeks, described the soldiers' plight: "We are having some very bad weather down here this week, it has been raining all day and you may know that we are having a bad time cooking our rations out of doors." After visiting his brother<sup>329</sup> in Wilmington earlier in the month, Thompson enviously wrote, "they have good tents and get plenty to

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<sup>327</sup> Barrett, 149-50; Samuel P. Lockhart, Goldsboro, North Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, January 18, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>328</sup> Wagstaff, 137.

<sup>329</sup> John Thompson was then serving in the 31<sup>st</sup> North Carolina, Clingman's Brigade.

eat...they don't know what hard times is." Despite the lack of shelter and food, the men of the regiment, as previously mentioned, were well clothed by this time with state issued uniforms and additional clothing from home. David Thompson mentioned that he had "two suits of underclothing, an extra pair of new janes [jeans-cloth] pants, and a bell crowned [slouch] hat" at this time. With the advent of warmer weather, some soldiers, such as Samuel Lockhart, began sending their overcoats and other excess clothing home for safekeeping.<sup>330</sup>

Fortunately for the men of the Twenty-Seventh, they were about to move on down to Wilmington themselves. In the same letter quoted above, David Thompson speculated on the regiment's destination, "part of our brigade has already gon and we are waiting for the train. I don't know where we are going, we are going to Wilmington first [but] we may stay there or go to Charleston or Savannah."<sup>331</sup> Sometime during the brigade's final days near Burgaw, General Cooke, having sufficiently recovered from his Fredericksburg wound, returned to command. He was just in time to accompany the brigade on another movement. According to Captain Sloan, "On the night of February 20<sup>th</sup> we left these plaintive pines, marched to Wilmington [apparently a train was not available], and were soon aboard of the cars destined for Charleston, S.C." Riding aboard open flat cars on

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<sup>330</sup> Sloan, 59; David Thompson, Burgaw Station, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, February 15, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; David Thompson, Burgaw Station, North Carolina, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, February 17, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Samuel P. Lockhart, Coosawhatchie, South Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, March 11, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>331</sup> David Thompson, Burgaw Station, North Carolina, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, February 17, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

the Wilmington and Manchester Railroad, the brigade, “about mid-day of the 22<sup>nd</sup>—after slight detentions at Marion Court House and Florence [where they transferred to the North Eastern Railroad]—arrived at the depot at Charleston.” Like their brief stopover in Wilmington, the regiment was to see little of the city. The next day the brigade boarded the cars of the Charleston and Savannah Railroad and headed for Pocotaligo Station. They remained there for a few days before moving on to Coosawhatchie, eight miles further down the tracks and sixty miles southwest of Charleston, on or about March 1. Lieutenant Graham described the movement of the regiment during this week: “We left Charleston a week ago this morning and arrived at Pocotaligo that evening, stayed there till Wednesday [March 1] when we started for this place and reached here Wednesday evening.”<sup>332</sup>

The movement to Pocotaligo and Coosawhatchie by Cooke’s Brigade was all part of General P.G.T Beauregard’s plan to defend Charleston against Union General David Hunter’s upcoming offensive. Despite the presence of an impressive set of fortifications protecting Charleston harbor and the outlying islands, the city itself was vulnerable to an attack from the rear, especially if its railroad lifelines were jeopardized. Seeing the need to protect the Charleston and Savannah Railroad from possible Union forays, which could be launched from Federal occupied Beaufort and Port Royal, Beauregard, commanding the Department of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, ordered numerous small commands to garrison vital points along the railroad. Coosawhatchie, named for a sluggish easterly flowing river that provided the Federals an avenue of attack towards the

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<sup>332</sup> Sloan, 60; Wagstaff, 138; Jordan and Manarin, 4; Clark, 439.

railroad, was one such point. From early March until late April, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, in conjunction with the Fifteenth North Carolina, two companies of the First South Carolina Sharpshooters, and two light artillery batteries, remained garrisoned approximately one mile east of the railroad, all the while watching for Federal movements up the river. Meanwhile, Cooke's other two regiments, the Forty-Sixth and Forty-Eighth North Carolina, remained encamped near the railroad at Pocotaligo. Both halves of the brigade were now within the jurisdiction of Brigadier General W.S. Walker's Third Military District of South Carolina, which was charged with protecting the vital supply lines between Charleston and Savannah.<sup>333</sup>

Upon arrival at Coosawhatchie, the men of the regiment recorded their first impressions of the area and its appearance. Writing to his mother the day after arriving in camp, Lieutenant Graham stated, "We are now down in the swamps and rice lands of eastern Carolina...I believe we are in the Beaufort District...this is the lowest and swampiest country I ever saw." Captain Sloan likewise described the surroundings: "The country around Coosawhatchie is low and marshy; the lakes and streams abound with alligators; the forests of live-oak, shrouded and festooned with a gray moss, present a weird and picturesque appearance." Despite their less than encouraging descriptions of the place, the soldiers' mood was lightened when a large supply of tents arrived for their use. James Graham was pleasantly surprised by this event and proudly told his parents, "We have at last got tents enough the men, for the first time since last August." With shelter from the elements, light picket duty along the railroad and the river, and

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<sup>333</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 14, 822-25, 862-63; Jordan and Manarin, 4.

seemingly little chance for a battle, the regiment “passed a quiet and pleasant time,” according to one officer.<sup>334</sup>

Despite a stable camp and relatively light duties, however, the men of the regiment were plagued by poor rations, swarms of insects, and nearly constant rain. In addition, their nearness to the swamp caused many to worry about the potential for sickness once warmer weather arrived. David Thompson, writing to his sister, commented on the situation facing the men of his company: “This is the worst place I have been at yet; the water is not fit to drink and we don’t get any thing to eat but beef and cornbread and the beef is so poor it won’t make a shadow; if it wasn’t for the few shad we get I don’t know what we’d do.”<sup>335</sup> In commenting on the plague of insects and the disagreeable weather, one officer wrote, “We are having a fine time down here with the gnats and sandflies. Some days they bite very bad, and I expect that we will have mosquitoes by the bushel in a few more weeks. The weather for the past three or four days has been very cold for this season of the year and this with the rain that has fallen for two days renders it very disagreeable.” In commenting on the health of the camp, Lieutenant Graham wrote, “Although very healthy now; it must certainly be very sickly during the summer months...I hope we will not have to stay here this summer.”<sup>336</sup>

In one respect, the regiment’s position was very agreeable to those in the ranks. After nearly two years of war, the officers and men knew a good defensive position when they saw it, and, despite the lack of enemy activity at present, nearly all agreed that

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<sup>334</sup> Wagstaff, 138; Sloan, 61.

<sup>335</sup> David Thompson, Coosawhatchie, South Carolina, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, March 7, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>336</sup> Wagstaff, 139-40.

Coosawhatchie was an excellent spot from which to fight. In describing the advantages for defense, Private Thompson commented, “I don’t think the yankees will come out here, we have the advantage of ground, they will have to come up through a rice field with a marsh on both sides and we have batteries to command the rice fields and we can mow them down by the whole sale if they come up here.”<sup>337</sup> Given the toughness of the position and the difficult local terrain, Federal forces never attempted to drive the Twenty-Seventh from its position protecting the railroad.

Even without a fight, though, the men of the regiment were kept relatively busy and disciplined through repetitive drill, policing the camp, and assisting local engineers in building bridges and causeways across nearby streams and swamps. Private Thompson of Company G provides evidence of just how much drill, especially skirmish drill, the men of the regiment were participating in during this time: “We are having a good deal of drilling to do now, we have to skirmish two hours and a half every day.” Thompson, in another letter home, also mentioned having to clean up the regiment’s camp for an inspection the next day. Meanwhile, Private Samuel Lockhart, writing to his sister, mentioned “we have to clean our streets up [and] the drums have just beat for roll call.”<sup>338</sup> In terms of construction work, Lieutenant Graham described one such project in which part of Company G helped to construct a bridge over the Coosawhatchie River: “I

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<sup>337</sup> David Thompson, Coosawhatchie, South Carolina, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, March 7, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 139.

<sup>338</sup> David Thompson, Coosawhatchie, South Carolina, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, March 7 and 19, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Samuel P. Lockhart, Coosawhatchie, South Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, April 9, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

was at work all day yesterday building a bridge and the gnats and sandflies were so bad on the river bank that we had to build up fires and work in the smoke to keep them off.”<sup>339</sup>

With the return of Colonel John Gilmer on or about March 6, all of the regiment’s field officers were once again in place. The Twenty-Seventh also received a new sergeant major during March. Robert D. Weatherly, formerly a Corporal in Company B, was permanently appointed to the position that had been temporarily held by Walter Knight since the Battle of Sharpsburg. In addition, the size of the regiment continued to grow as recovered wounded, paroled prisoners, and new recruits were forwarded to camp. David Thompson wrote his mother on March 19, “I recon that the boys that belong to our Co. that are prisoners [from Sharpsburg] will be exchanged soon.”<sup>340</sup> Recording the arrival of a batch of new recruits, Private Lockhart of the same company, wrote on April 9, “We have got nine new men. They came from Maj. Mallet’s Battalion at Camp Holmes, near Raleigh.”<sup>341</sup> Despite the fears of an increase in sickness, the regiment’s rate of disease was surprisingly light throughout its time in the Coosawhatchie area. Writing on April 27, after nearly two months in camp, Assistant Surgeon Leander Hunt commented, “We have lost four men since we came to this state, yet the health of

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<sup>339</sup> Wagstaff, 141.

<sup>340</sup> David Thompson, Coosawhatchie, South Carolina, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, March 19, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>341</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Coosawhatchie, South Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, April 9, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

our Regt. is very good.”<sup>342</sup> The season of the year and the success of the regiment’s officers in keeping the camp clean and sanitary most likely had much to do with the low death rate. In comparison, the regiment had lost many more men to disease while stationed in the lowlands of eastern North Carolina and Virginia during the first two years of the war. One of the few who died of disease during this time was the regimental Adjutant William Wilson. Walter Ashland Knight of Company A quickly replaced him. As a result of the addition of new men into the regiment, a low rate of disease, and continued drill and inspection, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina became a larger, healthier and more disciplined unit during its time in garrison at Coosawhatchie.<sup>343</sup>

The expected Union assault on Charleston began on April 7 with a naval attack against Confederate occupied Fort Sumter. Despite the use of numerous ironclad warships, the Federal fleet was driven back by heavy and accurate Confederate artillery fire, losing one vessel in the process. The Union land forces never got into the fight and the attack was a complete failure. This failed Union offensive almost resulted in the movement of Cooke’s Brigade to the Charleston area during the first week of April. Lieutenant Graham, writing to his mother on April 12, stated, “We have been under marching orders and ready to move for the past four or five days, but I expect we will not move from here now until the enemy attack Charleston again.”<sup>344</sup> Closer to Coosawhatchie, and in conjunction with the attack on Charleston, a Union transport attempted to steam up river towards Pocotaligo but was driven off by Confederate shore

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<sup>342</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Coosawhatchie, South Carolina, to Miss M.A. Conrad, Panther Creek, North Carolina, April 17, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

<sup>343</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 8.

<sup>344</sup> Wagstaff, 142.

batteries. During these events, the Twenty-Seventh, as well as the rest of the brigade, remained in camp. The repulse of the Union attack encouraged the men of the regiment. Private Lockhart wrote home about this time: “The opinion of some is that if they can’t take Charleston with their navy, that they intend landing a force and trying it by land. I don’t think they can take Charleston easy, for it is the best fortified place I ever saw.”<sup>345</sup>

In addition to the increase in morale brought about by the successful defense of Charleston, the troops at Coosawhatchie were further encouraged by the arrival of spring with its warmer and dryer weather. During the last week in March, one officer had written, “We have had very pretty weather for the past week.” Samuel Lockhart informed his sister on April 9, “It is very warm and pleasant here. The trees are getting right green.”<sup>346</sup> Despite the pleasant weather and good news from Charleston, however, the quantity and quality of the men’s rations continued to be a source of complaint. In another letter to his sister, Private Lockhart wrote, “I am cook this week; I do not like it much; we have been getting crackers for the last two or three days; crackers and beef is a poor chance. Sometimes we get nothing for dinner but rice and cornbread. If it was not for what we bought we would suffer. It takes all my wages to get something to eat.”<sup>347</sup> Lockhart’s letter suggests that the men of the regiment often resorted to cooking their meals in a group or mess of several soldiers and that the troops were still receiving at

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<sup>345</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Coosawhatchie, South Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, April 9, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>346</sup> Wagstaff, 141; Samuel P. Lockhart, Coosawhatchie, South Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, April 9, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>347</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Coosawhatchie, South Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, March 28, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

least some of their monthly pay, allowing them to buy additional food to supplement their meager rations. Continuing Lockhart's complaint, Assistant Surgeon Hunt commented on the change of diet necessitated by the regiment's posting: "We don't eat wheat bread here. I have not had any since we left N.C. We can get fish and beef a plenty but hog meat is scarce...corn bread and beef is the best we can do down here."<sup>348</sup> Luckily for the men's stomachs, Cooke's Brigade's garrison days in South Carolina were quickly coming to an end as the month of April waned.

By late April the immediate threat to Charleston had apparently decreased enough to admit the transfer of Cooke's Brigade back to North Carolina under the direction of General D.H. Hill. While the Twenty-Seventh was stationed in South Carolina, momentous events were transpiring in North Carolina and Virginia. Early in the year, General James Longstreet's First Corps from the Army of Northern Virginia had been sent to southeastern Virginia in order to bottle up Federal garrisons in the area and procure as much provisions as possible for Lee's army. D.H. Hill's command, reinforced for the undertaking, was also busy during March and April in besieging the Union garrison towns of New Bern and Washington. Although both sieges ended in failure for the Confederates, the consequent distraction of Union forces allowed vast amounts of foodstuffs to be removed from eastern North Carolina to the benefit of the Confederate Army. With further Union intentions along the coast of the Carolinas still uncertain, Confederate leaders continued to shuffle troops along the railroads in order to have

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<sup>348</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Coosawhatchie, South Carolina, to Miss M.A. Conrad, Clemmons ville, North Carolina, March 15, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

mobile strike forces ready to respond to any enemy movement. With this general strategy motivating its transfer, Cooke's Brigade packed up and left Coosawhatchie and Pocotaligo on April 23. Retracing their exact route from two months previously, the men once again boarded the cars of the railroad and left the lowlands of South Carolina behind them. Captain Sloan described the movement of the regiment: "We left Coosawhatchie on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, arrived at Charleston, S.C., the following day, and on the 25<sup>th</sup> reached Wilmington, N.C."<sup>349</sup>

Upon the brigade's arrival in Wilmington, the regiment went into camp several miles below the city. Immediately, the soldiers began commenting in letters home about how glad they were to be back in North Carolina again. Lieutenant Graham, soon to be promoted to first lieutenant of Company G, told his mother, "We left Coosawhatchie last Thursday [April 23] and reached Wilmington yesterday evening. I am glad that we have got back to North Carolina again and hope that we will stay here some time. We are camped about three miles south of Wilmington on the Cape Fear river." Private John Clark did not mince words when he commented, "I never want to go back to South Carolina again while the war lasts."<sup>350</sup> While the regiment remained in its simple bivouac, for once again tents had not kept up with the troops' movement, one topic of conversation involved the interesting fact that they had almost been sent to the war's western theater. Private William Hunt of Company B, Assistant Surgeon Leander Hunt's brother, commented on this transfer that never was: "I have heard since we left

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<sup>349</sup> Sloan, 63; Barrett, 149-59; Trotter, 191-203.

<sup>350</sup> Wagstaff, 143; John K. Clark, Magnolia, North Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, May 6, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

Coosawhatchie there was a dispatch came for us to go to the west in about two hours after we left.” Private Thompson elaborated on the subject: “If we hadn’t left Coosawhatchie when we did we would have been on our way to Tennessee now. General Walker got orders not more than two hours after we left for all the troops under his command to go to Tennessee.”<sup>351</sup>

While camped outside of Wilmington, many soldiers in the regiment hoped to remain near the city, which provided them with ample provisions and an opportunity to visit the largest urban center in North Carolina. In addition, if the brigade remained in one place for a while, furloughs would most likely become available to some of the men, allowing them to visit loved ones at home, if only for a few days. Lieutenant Graham wrote his mother the day after the regiment arrived in Wilmington, “If we stay here any length of time I will try to get a furlough and come home.”<sup>352</sup> Meanwhile, Private William Hunt commented to his sister, “I hope we will get to stay in North Carolina all this summer...there will be some prospects of getting home.”<sup>353</sup> Brief furloughs had been given to the men of the Twenty-Seventh on occasion throughout their nearly two years of service, but many soldiers had yet to visit home since their enlistment.

Continued enemy operations in eastern North Carolina must have made those men from the region, some of whom had loved ones caught between Federal and Confederate

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<sup>351</sup> William J. Hunt, Wilmington, North Carolina, to Miss M.A. Conrad, Clemmons, North Carolina, April 27, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina; David Thompson, Wilmington, North Carolina, to Mary Thompson, April 28, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>352</sup> Wagstaff, 143.

<sup>353</sup> William J. Hunt, Wilmington, North Carolina, to Miss M.A. Conrad, Clemmons, North Carolina, April 27, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

lines, very uneasy about their families' welfare. Sergeant Joseph F. Maides of Company I was from Jones County, which stood squarely between Confederate forces in and around Kinston and Union troops in New Bern. Concerned for the safety of his mother, Maides wrote, "It gave me great satisfaction to hear from you...I was very glad to hear that the Yanks had not paid you a visit lately, I hope they will not visit you so often as heretofore."<sup>354</sup> Maides and others like him were frequently disheartened in that they were unable to assist in driving the Federals from their own homes, instead marching and fighting where the army told them to.

Despite many wishes to remain near Wilmington, on May 5, upon the arrival of Clingman's North Carolina Brigade in the city, Cooke's Brigade was once again underway on the cars of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, this time heading north. Once again, the men of the Twenty-Seventh were being moved around like chess pieces on a game board. Confederate commanders in North Carolina continued to shuffle brigades around the state in order to be ready for any renewed enemy action. Arriving at Magnolia, a small town along the railroad, on the afternoon of the fifth, the regiment went into camp. Private Lockhart described the situation to his sister: "We arrived here yesterday about two o'clock; we are camped about two miles northeast of Magnolia; we have a very rough camp, but I don't think we will stay here long. I wish they would settle us down here or somewhere else, for I am tired of moving about."<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Joseph F. Maides, Magnolia, North Carolina, to his Mother, Jones County, North Carolina, May 6, 1863, Joseph F. Maides Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>355</sup> Sloan, 63; Samuel P. Lockhart, Magnolia, North Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, May 6, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

During the regiment's stay at Magnolia, several soldiers remembered seeing Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens as he passed through the railroad town. Private John Clark described the encounter in a somewhat comedic way, writing, "Sam and myself have been to the depot today and had the pleasure of seeing [Vice] President Stephens; he is the ugliest man I ever saw,"<sup>356</sup> while his cousin Samuel Lockhart described the Vice President as "a poor looking man...but he can put up a No. 1 speech." While in bivouac, tents having not caught up with the regiment, many officers and men received news of the recent battle fought in Virginia between Lee's army and the Army of the Potomac, now under a new commander named Joseph Hooker. Private Lockhart wrote home about the Confederate victory at Chancellorsville: "Vice President Stephens passed down to-day, he says the last fight in Virginia is the greatest victory that has been achieved since the war commenced. I was sorry to hear that General Jackson and General A.P. Hill were wounded."<sup>357</sup>

While the brigade lay encamped near town, the men of the regiment received increased and higher quality rations from the commissary, supplemented by numerous boxes of delicacies from home. In describing his comrades' cooking and eating habits, Private David Thompson commented, "Our mess has been living like fighting cooks ever since we got here." The town of Magnolia also offered subtle attractions to the soldiers. Private Lockhart described the railroad town as "a very nice little place; there are a good

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<sup>356</sup> John K. Clark, Magnolia, North Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, May 6, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>357</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Magnolia, North Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, May 6, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

many nice young ladies there [and] there are two churches [with] preaching at the Methodist church.”<sup>358</sup> Despite this tranquil setting and the fact that General Cooke had just begun giving out furloughs to several of the officers and men, including letter writer David Thompson, the soldiers of the brigade, under orders from General D.H. Hill, once again boarded the cars of the railroad on or about May 9 and resumed their ride north, this time heading for Goldsboro.<sup>359</sup>

Upon their arrival in the city that afternoon, the men of the Twenty-Seventh bivouacked along the railroad east of town and once again speculated upon what the next few days would bring. First Lieutenant Graham, now second in command of Company G, wrote, “We are camped two miles from Goldsboro on the Rail Road to Kinston. I have no idea how long we will stay here or where we will go when we leave, but I suppose we will either go to Kinston or Fredericksburg wherever we are most needed.” Lieutenant Graham’s reasoning was correct. On or about May 15, Hill, now commanding the Department of North Carolina and Southern Virginia and believing that Federal forces in New Bern would soon advance in his direction, ordered Cooke’s Brigade to proceed to Kinston by rail. Boarding the cars of the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad, the regiment soon arrived in the town and quickly went into bivouac three or four miles to the east, “in the same camp we occupied a little over a year ago.”<sup>360</sup> Back in their old stomping grounds once again, the men of the regiment believed they

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<sup>358</sup> David Thompson, Magnolia, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, May 5, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Samuel P. Lockhart, Magnolia, North Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, May 6, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>359</sup> Wagstaff, 144; Sloan, 63; Clark, 439.

<sup>360</sup> Wagstaff, 144-46.

would probably remain in the area for a while. Even as some soldiers looked forward to a respite from the recent movements, some, such as Assistant Surgeon Hunt, were disappointed at the regiment's current position: "I wish they would send us back to Va... I am tired of eastern North Carolina. I had much rather be with the main body of the army. There it looks like doing something but where we are we have but six or eight thousand men, there is no chance to do anything here."<sup>361</sup>

Ironically, even as D.H. Hill detained Cooke's Brigade near Kinston in order to reinforce his command, General Robert E. Lee, fresh from his victory at Chancellorsville and soon to embark on another daring invasion of the North, requested that the Twenty-Seventh and its sister regiments re-join his army. In a letter to Cooke, written in mid May, General James Longstreet, still commanding Lee's First Corps, stated, "I have been trying to get my old command together for this summer's work. General Lee is now in Richmond and will issue the orders if it is possible to complete the arrangements."<sup>362</sup> Also requesting the return of Cooke's Brigade to the Army of Northern Virginia, Lee himself wrote to D.H. Hill stating, "Ransom and Cooke I consider as belonging to the Army of Northern Virginia and have relied upon their return...every man not required [for the defense of your department] I desire you to send to me." Lee and Longstreet's requests for the return of Cooke's Brigade provide a glimpse of how indispensable this reliable veteran brigade had become to Lee, as well as other Confederate generals, by early 1863. With additional hard fighting to come, the commander of the Confederacy's

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<sup>361</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Kinston, North Carolina, to Miss M.A. Conrad, Clemmonsville, North Carolina, May 18, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

<sup>362</sup> James Longstreet, Fredericksburg, Virginia, to John R. Cooke, Goldsboro, North Carolina, May 16, 1863, Cooke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

premier field army wanted his best troops at his side. Obviously he believed that Cooke's Brigade, including the Twenty-Seventh, had become an essential part of his army, one which he did not wish to leave behind while embarking on such an important campaign. Despite Lee's wishes, however, Federal operations would soon disrupt any plans to send the brigade back to Virginia.<sup>363</sup>

During the last week of April, Union General John Foster, in command at New Bern, had sent an expedition westward in order to break up Confederate picket garrisons between Union and Confederate lines. Following a brief skirmish along Gum Swamp, about eight miles east of Kinston, the Federals had withdrawn. On or about May 20, the Union commander decided to send another force toward Gum Swamp. Consisting of the Fifty-Eighth Pennsylvania as well as the Fifth, Twenty-Fifth, Twenty-Seventh and Forty-Sixth Massachusetts Regiments, and a battalion of cavalry, all under the command of Colonel J.R. Jones, the Federal expedition planned to surprise the Confederate force located near the swamp. The Confederate garrison, made up of elements of the Twenty-Fifth and Fifty-Sixth North Carolina Regiments of Robert Ransom's Brigade, failed to detect the approaching Union column. On the morning of May 22, the Federals succeeded in driving the defenders from the position, capturing 165 men in the process. Learning of Ransom's predicament, General Hill quickly ordered his remaining troops in and around Kinston to move quickly toward the site of the skirmish and drive back the attackers. The men of the Twenty-Seventh, posted on the eastern side of town, quickly

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<sup>363</sup> Dowdey, *Papers of R.E. Lee*, 476-86.

took up their muskets and, at about 11:00 a.m., set off along with the remainder of Cooke and Ransom's brigades.<sup>364</sup>

Lieutenant Graham of Company G, then serving as acting Ordnance Officer for the brigade, described the ensuing engagement to his mother: "About five or six miles from Kinston our Brigade formed a line of battle and commenced advancing on the Yankees who had already taken the back track toward Newbern. We caught up with the Yanks after a short while and had a little skirmishing and artillery firing with them, but they soon skedaddled and we followed right on their track." Suddenly confronting two full Confederate brigades, the Union raiding force quickly fell back towards New Bern. By midnight, the skirmishing had largely drawn to a close with the exception of occasional nervous pickets firing into the darkness. The long-range fight continued the next morning as the two sides confronted each other across Core Creek. Once again, James Graham provided a good description of the fight: "We drove their pickets across the creek and followed them till night, driving them as far as Batchelor's Creek about 8 miles from Newbern, and then started on our return." By the morning of May 25, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina had returned to camp. The men were exhausted but had suffered only one casualty during the expedition. Private G.S. Johnston of Company H received a wound in the leg, which later required amputation. Casualties for the operation as a whole were very light for both sides, although Colonel Jones of the Fifty-Eighth Pennsylvania, commander of the Union expedition, was killed during the final actions outside of New Bern. Captain Sloan of Company B commented on the

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<sup>364</sup> Trotter, 203-4; Barrett, 163.

engagement in his postwar history: “We formed a portion of the troops engaged in this expedition, and succeeded in driving the enemy within their lines, and destroying the block-houses they had made for their defense. We gained nothing by this tramping, except a few cases of malarial fever, occasioned by our swamp-wading.” In commenting to North Carolina Governor Zebulon Vance on the performance of his command during the fight, General D.H. Hill stated, “I never saw men behave better than Cooke’s skirmishers and all manifested the utmost coolness and in fact eagerness.” Hill’s statement serves as a great honor to the endurance and professionalism of Cooke’s regiments, including the Twenty-Seventh.<sup>365</sup>

While Colonel Gilmer’s command marched and skirmished with Federals between Kinston and New Bern, an undetermined number of men from the regiment were detailed on detached service in Johnston and Sampson counties. Assigned to hunt down Confederate deserters and collect un-willing conscripts, Private Samuel Lockhart informed his sister, “I have been in Johnston County nearly two weeks, hunting for deserters. We have caught about twenty deserters and conscripts together. We are now in Sampson County; we are stationed at a cross roads twenty-eight miles from Fayetteville. I am getting tired of running about in the woods hunting men.”<sup>366</sup> To Lockhart’s relief, the detail would re-join the regiment in Kinston by the end of May. So far in this war, the Twenty-Seventh had lost relatively few men to desertion. Other than a handful of recruits who had left the ranks in 1861, most deserters from the regiment had

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<sup>365</sup> Wagstaff, 145-46; Trotter, 204; Jordan and Manarin, 78; Sloan, 63; Barrett, 164.

<sup>366</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Sampson County, North Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, May 23, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

ultimately returned to duty after a brief stint in hiding, probably among their families. It would be some time before the scourge of permanent desertion would seriously affect the strength of the regiment.<sup>367</sup>

By the first of June, the regiment was once again united in its camp outside of Kinston. Those men who had been lucky enough to receive a furlough earlier in the month were quickly brought back into the ranks and further furloughs were cancelled as the movement of Cooke's Brigade was expected at any time. Many officers and soldiers in the regiment believed that they would soon be sent to Virginia, hopefully to rejoin Lee's army. Private Thompson, recently returned from a brief furlough home, wrote to his mother on June 3, "This week General Cooke told some our boys that we would go to Petersburg [soon]."<sup>368</sup> Private Lockhart of the same company wrote his sister, "Some of the boys have just returned from headquarters and say we are going to Virginia tomorrow." Lieutenant Graham, privy to additional information from the regiment's field officers, confirmed the rumors: "Our Reg't leaves for Virginia tomorrow morning [June 4]...we are ordered to Petersburg. I do not know whether we will stay at Petersburg or go to Northern Virginia." Before leaving Kinston, the regiment was issued new clothing by the Quartermaster Department. Samuel Lockhart, planning on sending much of his old uniform home, wrote, "As we have drawn clothes, I will send [home] one

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<sup>367</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98; most of the deserters from the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina left the ranks in late 1864 and early 1865, of the 231 men listed as having deserted from the regiment during the war 28 (12%) ultimately returned to duty, many of these had left in 1862 or 1863.

<sup>368</sup> David Thompson, Kinston, North Carolina, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, June 3, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

pair of pants and a hat. I already sent my [old] boots and two pairs of socks.”<sup>369</sup> The amount of clothing that some soldiers were sending home at this time is evidence that the men of the regiment remained adequately clothed and shod by this stage of the war.

The expected movement to Virginia was predicated upon orders received by Cooke from D.H. Hill, now headquartered in Petersburg, on June 2. These orders stated: “I want you to move with all possible dispatch to Richmond. I think that Lee is but waiting for you. The wagons that you have must be left in Kinston.” Believing that Cooke’s Brigade would join Lee’s army upon its arrival in Virginia, Hill continued, “It gives me real pain to part with you and your brave men. May you have long life and great success in killing yankees.” With these orders in hand, Cooke’s Brigade prepared for the journey north. After negotiating with local commanders for space aboard the cars of the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad and calling in his picket detachments, General Cooke ordered his regiments to embark on the morning of June 4. Stopping briefly at Goldsboro, where they switched to the rails of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, the brigade continued north overnight and throughout the day of the fifth. As the train rolled northward, the men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina believed that they would soon rejoin the Army of Northern Virginia and fully expected to participate in the coming summer’s fighting.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Kinston, North Carolina, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, June 3, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Wagstaff, 146.

<sup>370</sup> D.H. Hill, Petersburg, Virginia, to John R. Cooke, Kinston, North Carolina, June 2, 1863, Cooke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Alfred H. Colquitt, Kinston, North Carolina, to John R. Cooke, Kinston, North Carolina, June 3, 1863, Cooke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Sloan, 64-65.

## Chapter 7—June–September, 1863

**“This is a dark hour for our country but I have not lost hope yet. I think with the blessing of God we shall be able to come out victorious in the end.”**

**- Sergeant Joseph Maides, Company I<sup>371</sup>**

Upon the arrival of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina in Richmond on June 6, Cooke’s Brigade was ordered to proceed to Fredericksburg and join the division of Major General Henry Heth, then attached to A.P. Hill’s Third Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia. Hill’s Corps remained behind the Rappahannock as a rear guard while Longstreet’s First Corps and Richard Ewell’s Second advanced north and west towards the Shenandoah Valley on the first leg of Lee’s advance into Maryland and Pennsylvania. Before Cooke’s Brigade could leave Richmond, however, political considerations in the Confederate capital forbade the brigade from departing. From the beginning of Lee’s planned invasion of the North, Confederate President Jefferson Davis, as well as Secretary of War James A. Seddon and Department of Richmond commander General Arnold Elzey, had worried over exactly how many troops would be left to defend Richmond and southeastern Virginia. As Lee asked for all of his veteran brigades to be returned to his army, the politicians in Richmond did all they could to keep as many reliable Confederate soldiers near the capital as possible in order to protect the city from potential enemy attacks up the James River from Union occupied Norfolk and Fortress Monroe. This bickering over strategy affected not only Cooke’s Brigade and the Twenty-Seventh but also the brigades of Robert Ransom and Micah Jenkins, each of which had

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<sup>371</sup> Joseph F. Maides, Hanover Junction, Virginia, to his mother, Jones County, North Carolina, July 14, 1863, Joseph F. Maides Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

previous association with the Army of Northern Virginia and all of whom were ultimately kept from re-joining Lee. Captain Sloan of Company B wrote of this setback in his postwar history: “At the urgent request of General Elzey, in command at Richmond, our brigade was retained there, through which circumstance we failed to participate in the Pennsylvania campaign.”<sup>372</sup>

In the end, through the machinations of Davis, Seddon, and Elzey, Cooke’s Brigade was retained in limbo between the Department of North Carolina and Southeastern Virginia, still under the command of General D.H. Hill, and the Department of Richmond, while the relatively green troops of Brigadier General Joseph Davis, President Davis’ nephew, were attached to Heth’s Division in their stead. Upon learning of the brigade’s detention, General Lee, through his Chief of Staff, R.H. Chilton, pessimistically informed Cooke, “I would gladly receive all acquisitions of strength available, especially of tried troops under a commander as well appreciated as yourself. I hope circumstances will soon justify your joining us.”<sup>373</sup> Despite his many entreaties, however, Lee’s wishes for the return of Cooke’s Brigade were in vain. The Twenty-Seventh and its sister regiments in the brigade were destined to remain in central and southern Virginia for the duration of the summer of 1863. Many officers and men were discouraged by their relegation to garrison duty. Lieutenant James Graham of Company G wrote home, “I wish we were with the main army, for I would a great deal rather be

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<sup>372</sup> Sloan, 65.

<sup>373</sup> R.H. Chilton, Headquarters of the Army of Northern Virginia, to John R. Cooke, Richmond, Virginia, June 22, 1863, Cooke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

there than to be here running after the Yankees every now and then. But somebody has to be here to defend Richmond and, it has fallen to our lot, I must be content with it.<sup>374</sup>

The regiment had been in Richmond for only three days when, on June 9, Cooke's Brigade was ordered by General Elzey to proceed to the Virginia Central Railroad Bridge over the South Anna River and protect the span from Union cavalry raiders operating from Union enclaves on the Peninsula. Protecting the railroad lifeline to the Army of Northern Virginia was an important albeit unexciting occupation, which Cooke's soldiers would become accustomed to over the course of the summer. Lieutenant Graham described the uneventful outing: "Last Wednesday [June 9] morning about daybreak we took the cars for South Anna bridge about 3 miles from Hanover Court House... We stayed there till Friday [June 11] evening guarding bridges and performing picket duty."<sup>375</sup> Private David Thompson of the same company commented on the operation in greater detail: "We are guarding bridges between Richmond and Hanover Junction... our Regiment is at the bridge over the South Anna River or at least six companies are here, the other four are at the North Anna five miles from here [guarding the bridge of the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad]." Having seen nothing of the enemy, the brigade returned to the Richmond area on June 11, leaving the Forty-Fourth North Carolina of Brigadier General James Pettigrew's Brigade, the bulk of which was attached to Lee's army, to defend the bridges.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> Sloan, 65; Clark, 439; Freeman, 533; Jordan and Manarin, 4; Dowdey, 476-506; Wagstaff, 150.

<sup>375</sup> Wagstaff, 147.

<sup>376</sup> David Thompson, near Hanover Junction, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, June 10, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Sloan, 65; Hess, *Lee's Tar Heels*, 109.

Upon their return to Richmond, Cooke's soldiers were ordered to report to Chafin's Bluff on the James River southeast of the city and opposite their old camp at Drewry's Bluff. After marching about for several days for seemingly little purpose, the regiment finally settled down in camp east of Richmond. Writing to his mother on June 14, Lieutenant Graham commented, "We are about six miles from Richmond on what is called the central road, leading from Richmond to Charles City C.H. From the way in which we have started I expect that we will have as much marching and moving about to do this Summer as we had last Fall."<sup>377</sup> From their position on Charles City Road near Richmond's outer defensive line, the men of Cooke's Brigade were well placed to repel any enemy raids or probes towards the city from the Peninsula. In addition, their proximity to the rail lines heading out of the capital theoretically allowed them to quickly respond to any further threats against the bridges over the North and South Anna rivers.<sup>378</sup>

Once established in their camp outside of Richmond, the soldiers of the Twenty-Seventh wrote letters to their loved ones informing them of their current occupations as well how the regiment was getting by in this its second assignment to the Richmond area in as many years. Assistant Surgeon Leander Hunt, having just returned from a brief furlough home, described to his sister the reasons why the brigade had not joined Lee's army: "I had no difficulty finding my Regt. It did not go with the division to Maryland. Our Brigade was left behind to guard Richmond and the surrounding country if the yanks

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<sup>377</sup> Wagstaff, 147.

<sup>378</sup> U.S. War Department, *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2003), 194.

should make an attempt to take the city.” With a stable camp, plenty of tents for the regiment, and only light picket duty and drill to keep the men occupied, only short rations and the constant rain caused them any trouble. Writing to his sister on June 21, Private Samuel Lockhart of Company G commented, “We get tolerable fair rations, but if we could get a little more, we could eat it and not half try...we had peas and cornbread for dinner. We have had good rain here and it looks like raining now.” Despite the weather and the precedence for sickness in the vicinity, the regiment remained in nearly excellent health. In the same letter quoted above, Private Lockhart wrote, “Our Company is in first rate health at this time; we have got but six or seven men absent [for any reason].”<sup>379</sup>

On June 26, following a quiet two weeks in camp, the men of Cooke’s Brigade were ordered to embark for the South Anna River and reinforce the Forty-Fourth North Carolina, which was then under attack by a Federal raiding force consisting of elements of three Union cavalry regiments. Two companies of the Forty-Fourth made a valiant effort to defend the Virginia Central Railroad Bridge but were finally overwhelmed by superior numbers. The Federal troopers managed to burn the span but were stopped from continuing on to the three other bridges in the area by the remaining companies of the Forty-Fourth, commanded by Colonel Thomas C. Singletary, formerly second in command of the Twenty-Seventh. The destruction of the railroad bridge slowed the arrival of Cooke’s Brigade to the vicinity until after the raiders had retreated. Assistant Surgeon Hunt described the regiment’s failure to save the bridge:

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<sup>379</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Richmond, Virginia, to Miss M.A. Conrad, Clemmonsville, North Carolina, June 28, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina; Samuel P. Lockhart, Richmond, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, June 21, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

The bridge was on fire when we got there and the yanks were gone. They burned the bridge across the South Anna River...we had one company there [actually companies A and G, 44<sup>th</sup> NC], they took the most of them prisoners after a hard fight. Our Regt. was sent to reinforce them but failed to get there in time on account of the burning of the trestle this side of Hanover Junction.<sup>380</sup>

With the Federals gone, Confederate laborers quickly went to work repairing the destroyed span. The Forty-Fourth, now temporarily attached to General Cooke's Brigade, re-occupied the defenses while the remainder of the brigade set out on the march back to Richmond. The railroad was apparently being used for more pressing matters at that time.<sup>381</sup>

Utilizing the right of way of the Virginia Central Railroad as a simple roadway, the Twenty-Seventh marched back towards Richmond during June 26 and 27. Having left their camp along the Charles City Road in a hurry, the regiment's tents were left behind. In addition, most of the soldiers had apparently neglected to bring their blankets or ground cloths with them. As the men marched south a heavy rain began to fall, soaking the entire regiment in the process. Leander Hunt described the ordeal in a rather sarcastic letter to his sister: "I had a very pleasant time out on the Central Road. I did not carry a blanket with me and it rained all the time we were out. I had to sleep out on the ground without cover...It was my own fault."<sup>382</sup> In addition to the constant rain, severe heat descended upon the region during the last week in June, making the tramping

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<sup>380</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Richmond, Virginia, to Miss M.A. Conrad, Clemmons ville, North Carolina, June 28, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

<sup>381</sup> Hess, 109-12, 176.

<sup>382</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Richmond, Virginia, to Miss M.A. Conrad, Clemmons ville, North Carolina, June 28, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

soldiers that much more miserable. By the evening of June 27, Cooke's Brigade was once again encamped east of Richmond, this time along Nine Mile Road near the Seven Pines battlefield of the previous year. Once back in camp, the men were re-united with their personal effects, those in need of clothing were issued new clothes, and many soldiers discovered that in their absence they had received boxes of food from home. Private Lockhart wrote to his sister on the twenty-ninth describing the happy condition of the men in his company: "We are camped on Nine Mile Road about five miles from Richmond. [Those at home] sent some fine boxes of provisions to the boys...you ought to see us eating Irish potatoes and beans and onions...I have drawn another new pair of pants and a shirt; I do not need any more clothes at present."<sup>383</sup>

Despite the heat and the rain, the men of the regiment, now sheltered from the elements once again, remained in good spirits. Many soldiers turned to discussion of news from Lee's army in Pennsylvania and the probable fate of Vicksburg. Most letter writers believed that Lee would deal a crushing blow to the enemy. Private Charles Watson commented, "I saw in the papers this morning where Genl. Ewell was fifty miles the other side of Baltimore...they are giving the Yanks hell over there," while Assistant Surgeon Hunt, harboring a vengeful attitude toward the enemy, told his sister, "It is almost an impossibility to get any reliable information from Lee's army [but] I hope he will burn every city and town he enters up north."<sup>384</sup> In terms of the fate of Vicksburg,

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<sup>383</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Richmond, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, June 29-July 3, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>384</sup> Charles J. Watson, Richmond, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, July 3, 1863, Charles J. Watson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Leander Gwynn Hunt, Richmond, Virginia, to Miss M.A.

many soldiers shared the beliefs of Samuel Lockhart who wrote home, “The Richmond papers today state that Gen. Johnston is in the rear of Grant at Vicksburg...I will be glad to hear that they have captured the whole of Grant’s forces, which I believe will be done if he is not very keen.”<sup>385</sup>

From their camp astride the Nine Mile Road, the Twenty-Seventh and the remainder of Cooke’s Brigade was still in an excellent position from which to disrupt any enemy attack or probe towards Richmond. Being near the capital allowed a select few officers and men to visit the city for brief periods. Leander Hunt made one such visit on June 28 but returned to camp complaining that the rumors of a Federal movement on Richmond made “the citizens too much excited.”<sup>386</sup> Those rumors claimed that a large enemy force under Union Generals Benjamin Butler and John Dix would soon sweep up the Peninsula to attack the city while Lee’s army was away. Those fears were partly realized on the first day of July, when a large enemy force was reported to be advancing towards the city from the east. Lieutenant Graham described the rumored Federal movement to his father in a letter home: “Wednesday night [July 1] it was ascertained that the enemy had advanced on the Williamsburg Road to within 15 or 16 miles of the city. Some persons said they were 10,000 strong and some went even so far as to put them down at 40,000.” Quickly taking stock of the threat, Major General Robert

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Conrad, Clemmons ville, North Carolina, June 28, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

<sup>385</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, near Richmond, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, June 21, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>386</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Richmond, Virginia, to Miss M.A. Conrad, Clemmons ville, North Carolina, June 28, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

Ransom, who had only recently replaced General Elzey as commander of the Department of Richmond, summoned General D.H. Hill and as many troops as could be spared from his department to move quickly to block the enemy advance. Throughout the night of July 1-2, Hill collected a division-sized force west of the Chickahominy River with which to defend Richmond. This force included the brigades of Brigadier Generals John Cooke, Micah Jenkins and Matt Ransom, who had assumed command of the brigade when his brother was promoted, as well as a small contingent of cavalry and artillery. During the morning hours of July 2, Hill's command moved out across the Chickahominy in search of the enemy.<sup>387</sup>

Lieutenant James Graham of Company G described the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina's role in the subsequent action on the second day of July:

Thursday morning our brigade, together with the rest of the troops around here, started to meet them. We advanced across the Chickahominy River [probably at New Bridge] and when we were some three or four miles beyond it the troops in advance came upon the Yankees who began to fall back after firing a few shots. After they once got started they did not stop except to fire a few rounds now and then. Instead of finding the enemy from 10,000 to 40,000 strong, as was reported, we found only two brigades who were out on a foraging expedition. A portion of Ransom's N.C. and Jenkins' S.C. Brigades with some artillery were the only troops engaged on our side. Our brigade was held rather in reserve. After following them till about 10 o'clock at night we started on our return to camp.<sup>388</sup>

During the daylong skirmish the small Federal raiding force was slowly driven back towards White House on the Pamunkey River where it found protection under the

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<sup>387</sup> Wagstaff, 148-49; Cunningham, "Lieut. Gen. D. H. Hill," *Confederate Veteran*, Vol. XXXVI, June 1930, (Nashville: S.A. Cunningham, 1930), 221; David S. and Jeanne T. Heidler, eds., *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War: A Political, Social and Military History*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000), 1602-03.

<sup>388</sup> Wagstaff, 148-49.

covering fire of Union gunboats. Private Charles Watson of Graham's company proudly commented on the skirmish to his sister: "We went in four miles of White House and found some Yanks on the other side of the Chickahominy and drove them back to there gun boats. We didn't lose any men out of our Regt...we took some prisoners and killed some of them but I don't know how many." Reminiscent of Gum Swamp, casualties had been light on both sides and, as Watson mentioned, the Twenty-Seventh did not suffer a single casualty during the day. By the morning of July 3, the regiment was once again back in its camp along Nine Mile Road, the men tired and sore but otherwise in good spirits after having helped drive the enemy back from the outskirts of Richmond.<sup>389</sup>

During the next few days, the regiment, along with the remainder of Cooke's Brigade, performed picket duty along the Chickahominy, paying close attention to bridges and fords along the river in their vicinity. The Twenty-Seventh had responsibility for guarding New Bridge, the various companies rotating the watch on a daily basis with two companies on duty at any given time. First Lieutenant Kenneth Rayner Jones of Company I recorded a typical day of picket duty in his diary entry for July 4: "Formed a line at 3 o'clock A.M...sent on picket at New Bridge...stacked arms...then we awaited further orders...nothing more of interest during the day." For those soldiers not on duty, life in camp remained rather dull and monotonous, except for the occasional drill session or inspection by Colonel Gilmer or General Cooke. Continued hot and rainy weather made life miserable for many officers and men of the regiment. First Lieutenant Graham,

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<sup>389</sup> Clark, 440; Charles J. Watson, near Richmond, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, July 3, 1863, Charles J. Watson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 148-49.

writing on July 7, which happened to be his birthday, told his mother, “We had a very heavy shower all yesterday evening and my tent, which is in rather a low place, was a perfect mudhole, almost as bad as a hogpen. The sun is trying to shine this morning and I hope that it will soon be dry again.”<sup>390</sup>

Talk in camp soon turned once again to news from Lee’s army. During the first week in July, reports and rumors slowly filtered down to Richmond, although definite information was impossible to get. At first, many soldiers believed that, despite the heavy casualties reported, Lee had once again beaten the enemy, now commanded by Major General George Meade, or at least fought them to a draw. Lieutenant Graham, in the same letter quoted above, commented, “The news from our army is very encouraging. Judging from the Yankee accounts, which are all we can get now, I think that Gen. Lee has given the Yanks a sound threshing at Gettysburg, Pa. From all accounts that I can hear the Old North State bore her part as nobly as ever.” As more reliable news from Gettysburg and Vicksburg arrived, however, reporting the facts of defeat as well as the casualties, the mood in camp slowly changed to one of renewed determination to press on despite the losses. Major Joseph Webb, writing to his Aunt in early July, commented, “I have been regretting all along that we were not sent to our Division (Heth’s) till I learned how terribly they suffered in the battles at Gettysburg.” Turning his thoughts to the fall of Vicksburg, Webb continued, “The fall of Vicksburg, tho’ a great loss to us, has been looked for so long, that it created but little or no depression in this part of the Army. I

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<sup>390</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Captain Kenneth Rayner Jones: Co. I, 27<sup>th</sup> N.C. Inf., Cooke’s Brigade, July 4, 1863-May 28, 1864,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1; Wagstaff, 150.

must confess that it looks very much as if we were about being visited by another set of reverses.” In a final burst of determination, the major wrote, “One thing I am satisfied of is that they can kill the most of us, but they can never conquer us.” Upon learning of the twin Confederate defeats of Gettysburg and Vicksburg as well as the fall of Port Hudson on the Mississippi River, Sergeant Joseph Maides of Company I, a very religious soldier, wrote his mother, “This is a dark hour for our country but I have not lost hope yet. I think with the blessing of God we shall be able to come out victorious in the end.”<sup>391</sup>

On July 8, Cooke’s Brigade received orders, probably from General Ransom, to proceed to Hanover Junction and assist the Forty-Fourth North Carolina in its continuing mission to protect the railroad bridges over the North and South Anna rivers. Marching from their camp on Nine Mile Road to the depot in Richmond, the Twenty-Seventh boarded the cars of the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad for the twenty-two mile ride north. Arriving at Hanover Junction that evening, the regiment went into bivouac while several companies were immediately deployed as pickets. Lieutenant Kenneth Jones recorded the specifics of his company’s trip: “Received orders at 2 o’clock A.M. to be ready to march to Richmond by 9 o’clock and marched to the Fredericksburg [Railroad] depot... road very muddy. At 11 o’clock took the cars to front of the Regt...it rained very hard...arrived at the junction by 6 P.M...sent on picket.”<sup>392</sup>

While individual companies from the regiment were posted to guard nearby bridges, the bulk of the Twenty-Seventh pitched their tents several miles south of

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<sup>391</sup> Wagstaff, 150; Hickerson, 74-75; Joseph F. Maides, Hanover Junction, Virginia, to his mother, Jones County, North Carolina, July 14, 1863, Joseph F. Maides Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>392</sup> Sloan, 65; Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, 1.

Hanover Junction near the village of Taylorsville. Lieutenant Graham, with his company on picket duty along the North Anna River, described the current situation to his mother: “Our Regt. is camped at Taylorsville about 3 miles from here on the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad. We left Richmond last Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> inst. Our company is up at this place on picket today.” With Lee’s defeat at Gettysburg, and the rapid retreat of the Army of Northern Virginia back into the Confederacy during mid July, the maintenance and defense of the railroads to northern Virginia took on an added importance to Confederate leaders. Sergeant Maides informed his mother on July 14, “We are camped at this time 22 miles from Richmond near Hanover Junction. The enemy have made several raids around Richmond but have withdrawn for the present. I understand that we are only waiting to see what they are going to do and if they should withdraw from here we shall go to Gen. Lee’s army.” Indeed, the belief that the brigade would soon be sent to join the main army was widespread in the regiment at this time. In the same letter quoted above, James Graham wrote, “we received orders yesterday morning to be ready to move at a moments notice...I wish very much that we could be sent to Gen. Lee’s army in Maryland.”<sup>393</sup> Major Webb, privy to additional information from headquarters, partly confirmed these rumors, stating, “Gen’l Lee sent for us a week ago but we were stopped here, I suppose because of the Yankee raids in VA and NC.” Countering this news and opinion however, were other rumors that the brigade would soon be sent back to South Carolina, as there had been heavy fighting reported around

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<sup>393</sup> Wagstaff, 151; Joseph F. Maides, Hanover Junction, Virginia, to his mother, Jones County, North Carolina, July 14, 1863, Joseph F. Maides Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

Charleston. Horrified at the prospect of another stint of garrison duty in the swamps of the palmetto state, Private Thompson informed his sister on July 12, "I don't think we will stay here long, some think we will go to Charleston again, [but] it is uncertain where we will go," while Major Webb commented, "We are very uneasy for fear we will be again sent to Charleston."<sup>394</sup> Ultimately, despite all the rumors of movement, the continued threat of Federal raids on Richmond and Lee's supply lines kept Cooke's Brigade and the Twenty-Seventh in its camp near Taylorsville for the remainder of July.

For the soldiers of the regiment, the daily monotony of picket duty and drill was interrupted only by the continually abysmal weather conditions and occasional attendance of religious services at a local Baptist Church. Referring to the heavy rain that pelted the men on their trip from Richmond to Taylorsville on July 8, Private Thompson commented, "it rained on us all the way here, every man in the regiment got wet," while Samuel Lockhart complained, "We have very hot weather here in the day time, but it is cool at night." Writing later in the month, Lieutenant Graham informed his father, "The rainy season seems to have set in with us again...it has rained every evening for the past week."<sup>395</sup> The nearness of a local Baptist Church allowed the men of the regiment a chance to escape from camp and get inside from the rain, if only for a few hours. Private Thompson, who chose to spend his time writing home instead of going to church, told his

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<sup>394</sup> Hickerson, 74; David Thompson, Hanover Junction, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, July 12, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>395</sup> David Thompson, Hanover Junction, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, July 12, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Samuel Lockhart, Hanover Junction, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, July 27, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Wagstaff, 153.

sister, “All the boys have gone to preaching at a Baptist Church.” Private Lockhart of the same company described one such service in late July: “I have been to preaching today; out at a Baptist Church about a quarter mile from camp. I heard a splendid sermon. It looked like old times to be at preaching, where there were ladies; but I hope the time is not far distant when we can all return to our homes.” Back in camp, rations were greatly improved during this time, possibly due to the regiment’s proximity to the railroad. In addition, the local supply of water was apparently a great improvement from that available east of Richmond. David Thompson described the men’s daily food allowance to his mother: “We are getting good rations now, half pound bacon, meal and flour, peas, rice, sugar.” “We have splendid water here,” wrote Samuel Lockhart, “[and] our Reg’t is enjoying very good health.” Despite the increased rations, clean water and a healthy campsite, however, Assistant Surgeon Leander Hunt could not help but comment on the dreariness and desolation of the region: “This is a very poor and desolate country...very few people live near here.”<sup>396</sup>

While Federal forces made no further efforts to destroy the numerous local bridges during the summer of 1863 and the previously burnt span over the South Anna was quickly rebuilt, the men of the Twenty-Seventh continued their guard duty, sending out company sized detachments to the various bridges on a daily basis. Lieutenant Jones,

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<sup>396</sup> David Thompson, Hanover Junction, Virginia, to Eliza and Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, July 12 and 21, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Samuel P. Lockhart, Hanover Junction, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, July 27, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Leander Gwynn Hunt, Taylorsville, Virginia, to Miss M.A. Conrad, Clemmons ville, North Carolina, July 20, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

who kept a relatively detailed diary during this stage of the war, made only one entry for July 12-24, in which he noted, “nothing of interest, rainy most of the time.” James Graham, astonished that Cooke’s Brigade had remained at Taylorsville for most of the month, wrote his mother, “We have not changed our camp since I last wrote. It seems almost like we were to be regularly stationed here, for we have been here for two weeks which is longer than we have stayed in any camp since last April and, in fact, is a very long time for “Cooke’s Foot Cavalry,” as we are called, to stay in one place.” During the last week of July, as the Army of Northern Virginia pulled back towards Culpepper Court House and the safety of the Rapidan River beyond, the Forty-Fourth North Carolina, which had been temporarily attached to Cooke’s Brigade for most of the month, departed to re-join the main army. With the departure of Colonel Singletary’s regiment, General Cooke’s remaining units, including the Twenty-Seventh, continued their daily routine and looked for some sign of movement that would take them away from the continued monotony and boredom of guard duty.<sup>397</sup>

With the return of Lee’s army to the area west of Fredericksburg, the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers once again became dividing lines between the two hostile armies. While the Army of Northern Virginia concentrated south of Culpepper Court House along the south bank of the Rapidan, the previously fought over city of Fredericksburg began to figure into Confederate defensive plans yet again. As Lee’s right flank, the area of the previous year’s battle would have to be defended against a

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<sup>397</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2; Wagstaff, 152; Freeman, 608-13; Hess, 176.

possible Union crossing of the Rappahannock. With Confederate forces spread thinly across central and southern Virginia and the main army recuperating from its recent campaign, the choice of which troops to send to Fredericksburg was limited to those units not currently engaged in holding a vital position. The troops of Cooke's Brigade, having had no contact with the enemy in some time, were ideally situated to move quickly to Fredericksburg and defend the line of the river. On the evening of July 31, according to Lieutenant Jones, "we received orders at 7 o'clock to issue 3 days rations of hard bread and be ready to march at a moments warning, at 8:30 struck tents, formed line and proceeded on a march to [Hanover] Junction to take the cars." Spending the night near Hanover Junction, the regiment boarded the cars of the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad and departed for Fredericksburg on the evening of August 1. Each regiment in Cooke's Brigade was required to detach two companies in order to maintain a guard over the bridges in the vicinity of Hanover Junction. Colonel Gilmer selected two companies from the Twenty-Seventh, including Kenneth Jones' Company I, to remain behind and protect the railroad bridge over the North Anna River.<sup>398</sup>

Upon arrival at Fredericksburg that evening, the men of the remaining eight companies, suffering from the intense heat, were temporarily billeted in abandoned buildings in the largely ruined city. Lieutenant Graham wrote home on August 3 describing the regiment's arrival in Fredericksburg: "We were at first placed in some of the unoccupied houses in the town and remained there all day yesterday; but as it was so

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<sup>398</sup> Sloan, 65-66; Wagstaff, 154; Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2-3. Jordan and Manarin, 4; David Thompson, Fredericksburg, Virginia, to John Thompson, Charleston, South Carolina, August 16, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

hot in the town we moved out here in the woods this morning. There is hardly a single house in the whole town, that I saw, that did show marks of Yankee rascality...nearly all the houses have been struck by their shot and shells.” While the troops bivouacked in the woods south of the city, the regiments of Cooke’s Brigade began performing picket duty along the river, one regiment on duty at a time, covering any fords or possible bridge sites in the immediate area. Once again, the Twenty-Seventh settled into a fairly monotonous daily routine of picket duty and drill, only occasionally spotting small enemy detachments across the river.<sup>399</sup>

Writing to his brother in mid August, Private Thompson described one stint of picket duty that turned rather lively upon the arrival of enemy skirmishers:

Our regiment has just come off of picket, we have been on two days; the yankees came into a little town on the bank of the river called Falmouth opposite to where we were on picket yesterday, about 200 in number; we didn’t intend to fire upon them at all, but they fired on us [and] we returned it, there was no damage done on our side [but] we wounded one Capt in the shoulder and hand, we could see them carrying him off. It was pretty fun shooting at them across the river with us concealed in the houses on the bank; the river was rather too wide to do much damage to them.<sup>400</sup>

Charles Watson also commented on this slight skirmish in a letter to his sister: “We were down on picket yesterday and some few Yankee Cavalry come up on the other side of the river and exchanged some few shots with us, we wounded one Yankee and then they skedadled...I don’t think there will be any fighting until cool weather over here.” For the most part, however, the regiment’s time on picket duty was unexciting and even tedious

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<sup>399</sup> Wagstaff, 154; Sloan, 65.

<sup>400</sup> David Thompson Fredericksburg, Virginia, to John Thompson, Charleston, South Carolina, August 16, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

for those involved, especially given the continually hot temperatures of central Virginia in August.<sup>401</sup>

In addition to shooting at the Federals across the river, the men of Cooke's Brigade, probably without their officers' approval, engaged in fraternization with Union troops on several occasions during their stay in the Fredericksburg area. Private Watson described once such incident that occurred in late August: "When we were at Fredericksburg there was plenty of Yanks on the other side of the river. Some of our boys had a talk with them across the river...they said they were all tired of the war." Private Thompson, writing to his sister in late August, commented on another episode of fraternization, "We had a pretty good time while on picket...the yankees were on one side of the river and we were on the other, we talked with and traded papers with them...they gave us some coffee and we gave them some tobacco." While off duty, the men did a lot of complaining about their current campsite. In describing the regiment's camp to his sister, Thompson commented, "I am nearly worn out with our present camp it is the worst place we ever camped in...it is in a place where the soldiers got wood last winter...the stumps of the trees are about as high as your waist and has grown from them sprouts as high as your head; when you go out of your tent if you don't notice the little paths very particularly you will get lost." However horrid this campsite, it apparently offered one advantage to the men of the regiment. According to Thompson, "there is one good advantage we have in it...there is no place inside of the encampment where you can

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<sup>401</sup> Charles J. Watson, Fredericksburg, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, August 16, 1863, Charles J. Watson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

form a company regularly, [therefore] we don't drill very much except in the manual of arms and that ant hard work."<sup>402</sup>

In addition to fairly light duty and sufficient tentage, the men of the regiment were glad to receive numerous boxes of food from those at home. Added to their normal rations, which were apparently adequate in both quantity and quality at this time, the extras from home provided the men with more than enough to eat. In one of his numerous letters home, David Thompson commented, "We have been faring very well since [the arrival of] our boxes...there was some of the things spoiled in my box but the potatoes, onions, and beets [were ok]...Walt brought 52 boxes for our company." In addition to food, supplies of Union clothes and equipment, left over from the previous year's battle and collected by the local citizens, were available for the taking. Once again, Private Thompson commented on this source of supply: "we supplied ourselves with knapsacks, haversacks, canteens, yankey cloths of every description, the citizens picked such things when the yankeys was there...they are very sociable people, the women would divide any thing they had with a Southern soldier." Overall, despite their less than desirable camp, the continued hot weather, and having not been paid for several months, the men of the regiment appeared to enjoy their time at Fredericksburg.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Charles J. Watson, Taylorsville, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, September 1, 1863, Charles J. Watson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; David Thompson, Fredericksburg and Taylorsville, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, August 17 and 31, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>403</sup> David Thompson, Fredericksburg, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, August 5 and 17, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

While eight companies of the Twenty-Seventh picketed the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg, two companies of the regiment, including Company I, remained behind near Hanover Junction, guarding the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad Bridge over the North Anna River. On August 11, these two companies came very close to joining their comrades at Fredericksburg. Lieutenant Jones commented on the movement in his diary entry for August 10-11: "At 3:30 p.m. received orders to march to the junction upon being relieved, and be in readiness to take the cars for Hamilton's Crossing, and rejoin our regiment...formed by day [August 11] and marched to junction [but] received orders to remain until ordered to leave by Elzey or Lee." Unfortunately for Jones and the rest of the detachment, those orders would never come. Instead, the troops would remain at the North Anna through the end of August.<sup>404</sup>

Back at Fredericksburg meanwhile, talk in camp turned political during mid-August, when news of anti-war activities in North Carolina reached the state's soldiers serving in Virginia. There had always been small pockets of pro-Union sentiment in the North State, but by the summer of 1863 this peace movement had a vocal new leader in newspaper editor W.W. Holden. As Editor of the *North Carolina Standard*, Holden used his power in an attempt to take North Carolina out of the war through negotiations with the United States, demanding that the state reverse its act of secession and rejoin the Union. Upon hearing of Holden's dissenting and possibly treasonous activities, many North Carolina soldiers became enraged. The men of the Twenty-Seventh Regiment

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<sup>404</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 3-4; he mentions receiving orders from General Elzey who was once again in command of the Department of Richmond, Robert Ransom having taken sick leave before joining Longstreet's Corps during its attachment to the Army of Tennessee in September-November, 1863.

were no exception. Private Thompson described the men's reaction to Holden's message in an August 17 letter to his sister:

There is a great deal of talk in camp about those Union meetings that are being held in some parts of N.C. the general opinion is that Bill Holden the editor of the N.C. Standard ought to be hung for publishing the proceedings of such meetings. Our Reg. held a meeting today to draw up some resolutions condemning Holden's course...we never will establish our independence if sutch things as that is allowed to go on.

Samuel Lockhart, commenting on the wrecking of Holden's printing press by Confederate troops and further describing the men's disgust with the anti-war movement in North Carolina, wrote home in early September:

The company is all down on Holden and [his] sympathizers and the way he is carrying on business. I see stated in the Richmond papers this morning that some soldiers pitched [Holden's] press into the street. I was sorry to hear that such state of things had occurred in the Old North State...I wish Holden and all his backers were in Yankeedom where their sentiments are. I reckon I want peace as bad as bad as anybody, but before I would yield to any thing less than an honorable separation from the United States, I would fight the balance of my days. The name of N.C. used to stand high, but if Holden is let alone, she will have a name equal to a traitor.

Obviously, despite the recent reverses, many officers and soldiers in the regiment still believed wholeheartedly in the cause of Confederate independence and that, with continued effort by the men in the ranks as well as those at home, North Carolina would help achieve that victory.<sup>405</sup>

On August 28, upon receiving news that Federals were once again in the vicinity of the bridges near Hanover Junction, Cooke's Brigade was ordered to reinforce the eight

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<sup>405</sup> Barrett, 171-72; David Thompson, Fredericksburg, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, August 17, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Samuel P. Lockhart, Taylorsville, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, September 11, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

companies of the brigade then holding the position. Marching quickly, the men of the Twenty-Seventh covered the nearly thirty miles to Hanover Junction in one day, reuniting with their two detached companies that evening. Continuing on to their old position near Taylorsville, the regiment pitched its tents and settled into camp once again. Despite the reports of Union activity in the area, no Federals were encountered. In commenting to his sister about this false alarm, Assistant Surgeon Hunt wrote, “We had a very hard march from Fredericksburg to this place. It was reported that the Yankees were advancing on Richmond in heavy force and that six thousand were advancing on the Rail Roads near here so Cooke’s Brigade was ordered to check them but when we got here we found it to be a false report.”<sup>406</sup> Private Watson also described the situation to his sister on September 1: “We came from Fredericksburg last week, we are now between Hanover Junction and Richmond. It was reported that we come here to protect some bridges but there is know Yankees about here.”<sup>407</sup>

After settling back into their previous camp, the various companies of the regiment took up guard duty and formed details to construct earthworks to further protect the bridges in the area. Private Thompson commented on the activities of the regiment in an August 31 letter home: “We have been fixing up camp ever since we got here, we are at the same camp we were at before we went to Fredericksburg...I expect we will have a

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<sup>406</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Taylorsville, Virginia, to Miss M.A. Conrad, Clemmons ville, North Carolina, August 30, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

<sup>407</sup> Sloan, 65; Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 4; Charles J. Watson, Taylorsville, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, September 1, 1863, Charles J. Watson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

right smart [amount] of work to do about here for the next week or two, throwing up breastworks, there was a detail of 17 men from our company this morning for that purpose, I will be on it tomorrow.” Charged with defending eight bridges with his four regiments, Brigadier General Cooke divided his command, giving each regiment responsibility for two spans. The routine of guard and picket duty continued much as before with several companies mounting guards for a few days and then being relieved by other detachments. In another letter, written in early September, Thompson told his sister, “I have to go off tomorrow from camp eight miles to a bridge. I will be gone 4 or 5 days. Our Brigade has 6 or 8 bridges to guard, our regt. has two.”<sup>408</sup>

While not performing guard duty or erecting earthworks, the men of the Twenty-Seventh were kept busy with extensive drill sessions, especially in the manual of arms, as well as numerous regimental and brigade inspections. Writing home on September 7, David Thompson commented, “I am glad of the chance to go [on work detail], I would rather go than stay in camp and drill [as much as] Col. Gilmer is putting us through now...I haven’t seen a regt. since I have been in the service that can beat us drilling in the manual of arms.” In another letter home written in late August, Thompson told his sister, “We are going to have Brigade inspection today, I dread it,” while on September 20 he commented, “I have just been on Regimental inspection, Gen. Cooke inspected us, he got after me about having a dirty gun.” On September 2, at General Cooke’s request, the usual daily routine was enlivened when the Twenty-Seventh and the Fifteenth North

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<sup>408</sup> David Thompson, Taylorsville, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, August 31 and September 7, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Carolina held an impromptu drill competition and foot race. In the same September 7 letter quoted above, Private Thompson described the occasion to his family: “Our regt. and the 15<sup>th</sup> ran a race a few days ago, the judges, Col. Hill of the 48<sup>th</sup> and Col. Hall of the 46<sup>th</sup>, decided it in our favor though they said there was but little distinction. Gen. Cooke has determined to have it over again in one month from now and Col. Gilmer is determined not to let them beat us.”<sup>409</sup>

A post-war newspaper article that appeared in the *Wilmington Star* also described this event in great detail. Ostensibly an obituary of Brigadier General William MacRae, the former colonel of the Fifteenth North Carolina, the article had this to say about the reputations of the two regiments:

There is a fact about Cooke’s Brigade that we have never seen in print, viz: it had two of the best-drilled regiments in Lee’s Army. They were the 15<sup>th</sup>—MacRae’s old regiment—and the 27<sup>th</sup>—Cooke’s old regiment. The 15<sup>th</sup> excelled in the evolutions; the 27<sup>th</sup> could not be beaten on the manual of arms. While encamped near Taylorsville, VA, during the summer of 1863, the 27<sup>th</sup>, knowing they could beat the 15<sup>th</sup> on the manual, and thinking they were about as good on the evolutions, challenged the 15<sup>th</sup> for a drill. It was promptly accepted and the day appointed. Col. R.C. Hill of the 48<sup>th</sup>, an old army officer, was to decide the contest. The 27<sup>th</sup> was handled by Col. Gilmer, the 15<sup>th</sup> by Col. MacRae. Col. Hill’s decision was just what most of us expected; the 27<sup>th</sup> the best on the manual, the 15<sup>th</sup> the best on the evolutions.<sup>410</sup>

This competition merely accentuated the continuing rivalry between the Twenty-Seventh and the Fifteenth North Carolina Regiments. This rivalry, between what many officers

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<sup>409</sup> David Thompson, Taylorsville, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, August 31, September 7 and 20, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 4-5.

<sup>410</sup> Unspecified post-war newspaper article from the *Wilmington Star*, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

would eventually consider to be two of the best drilled and most disciplined regiments in the Army of Northern Virginia, would continue until the closing days of the war.<sup>411</sup>

In addition to drill competitions, a religious revival swept through Cooke's Brigade during its second stay in the Taylorsville area, providing the men of the regiment with a respite from the daily routine. In his diary entries for September 13-17, Lieutenant Kenneth Jones recorded: "Brig. Preaching at 3 o'clock P.M. Baptizing at 4 1/2...Great revival of religion going on." Private Thompson also mentioned the revival in a letter to his sister: "There is a revival going on in our Brigade now, it has been going on a week today, there was a great many [attendees] last night." Luckily for the men in the ranks, the regiment apparently received at least some of its back pay during the month of September. Writing to his sister on the eleventh, Private Lockhart wrote, "I have some money to send [home] the first chance." Unknown to the officers and men of the regiment, the relatively easy time that they were now enjoying at Taylorsville would soon come to an end as Robert E. Lee planned a bold stroke to strike back at the Army of the Potomac, which continued to hold its position on the north bank of the Rapidan River.<sup>412</sup>

Beginning on September 24, under orders from General Lee, Cooke's Brigade was transferred from Taylorsville to Gordonsville by rail. Upon being relieved by elements of Pickett's Division, the men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina boarded

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<sup>411</sup> This continued rivalry and the prominence of the two regiments within Lee's army will be explained in greater detail in the following chapters.

<sup>412</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 5; David Thompson, Taylorsville, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, September 20, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Samuel P. Lockhart, Taylorsville, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, September 11, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

the cars of the Virginia Central Railroad for the relatively easy ride to the northwest. Lieutenant Jones, whose Company I was once again temporarily left behind for guard duty, described the movement in his diary entry for September 26: "Formed line and marched to Taylorsville a distance of 1 mile. Load the cars and arrived at Gordonsville by 3 PM a distance of 95 miles." Upon their arrival at Gordonsville, which lay behind Lee's army, Cooke's troops formed a small reserve for the Army of Northern Virginia and also maintained a defense along the rail line in Lee's immediate rear. In a letter to Confederate President Jefferson Davis written on September 27, Lee stated, "I have brought Cooke's Brigade to Gordonsville to have him as near as possible, while retaining him on the line of the railroad. The enemy [under General Meade] has made no serious advance yet [but] all his preparations indicate that intention." With two of Longstreet's divisions currently employed in Tennessee under General Braxton Bragg, Lee retained only Ewell's Second and Hill's Third Corps to hold the line of the Rapidan River. Rather than await Meade's offensive with his reduced force, Lee decided to cross the Rapidan and try to outflank the Federal army, hoping to deal the enemy a serious blow in the process. Unknown to the men of the Twenty-Seventh, the regiment was destined to play an important albeit tragic role in the upcoming campaign.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> Sloan, 65-66; Dowdey, 604-606; Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 5-6; Jordan and Manarin, 4; Samuel P. Lockhart, Gordonsville, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, September 28, 1863, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

## Chapter 8—October, 1863

**“The point from which we started the charge was distinctly marked; at least four, and in some cases ten, men from each company lying dead or wounded in that line.”**

**- First Lieutenant James Graham, Company G<sup>414</sup>**

Upon their arrival at Gordonsville during the last week of September, the men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina were once again officially attached to the Army of Northern Virginia, although Cooke’s Brigade was not yet organized into any specific division or corps of the army. While Lee planned his upcoming offensive, the men of the regiment made camp and continued the religious revival that had been sweeping through the ranks for several weeks. In a letter to his mother written on October 3, First Lieutenant James Graham of Company G, recently returned from a brief furlough home, described the regiment’s situation: “We are camped just on the edge of the town of Gordonsville and have a pretty good camp... The revival in our brigade is still going on and there are a good many converts every day and almost everyone is becoming serious. Instead of hearing swearing all the time you seldom hear an oath in our Reg’t now.” In addition to Lieutenant Graham, numerous other officers and men of the regiment were granted brief furloughs during this period despite the prospect for upcoming action, of which the troops remained oblivious. In commenting on the furloughs in his company, Private David Thompson told his sister, “Frank Woods and Jo. Woods will be the next two to go home on furlough from our neighborhood.” One of the lucky few to receive a furlough was First Lieutenant Kenneth Jones of Company I, who described the occasion

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<sup>414</sup> Clark, 442.

in his diary entry for September 29: "I left [Gordonsville] on the 4 o'clock train for home, on 15 days leave of absence [which] expires the 13 of Oct." For most of the regiment, however, the time spent in camp was most likely filled with the now familiar daily routine of drill, guard duty and inspection.<sup>415</sup>

While encamped near Gordonsville, the men of Cooke's Brigade were issued new uniforms and additional blankets in order to ward off the chill of approaching cold weather. Writing to his sister on October 9, Private Charles Watson commented, "Our regiment received a [new] uniform yesterday and I sent my old clothes in a box with the other boys...I didn't send anything but a coat and pair [of] pants." This new issue of bluish-gray jackets and trousers, which were apparently made of British cloth shipped through the blockade, was also mentioned by Captain John Sloan of Company B, who stated, "Governor Vance's faithful ship, the "Advance," had come in heavily laden, and we were proudly and splendidly dressed in some of the gray cloth of its cargo."<sup>416</sup> In addition to uniforms, some in the regiment received new blankets, which were also of British manufacture. Private Thompson wrote his sister in early October, "I am sorry that Mother sent me a blanket because I have just drawn one a great deal better than the one she sent, [it is] an English blanket." One reason for these new clothing issues was the gradual approach of cooler weather during late September and early October. In

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<sup>415</sup> Wagstaff, 155-56; David Thompson, Gordonsville, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, October 4, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 6; U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 24, Part I*, 401.

<sup>416</sup> Charles J. Watson, Madison Court House, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, October 9, 1863, Charles J. Watson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Sloan, 67.

commenting on the current temperatures, Assistant Surgeon Leander Hunt told his sister, “Times are rather dull up here and I must say getting cold. We have had frost...the nights are very cold but [it is] warm throughout the day.”<sup>417</sup>

Meanwhile, the Confederate victory at the Battle of Chickamauga in late September caused consternation in Washington. With the Union Army of the Cumberland penned up in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Braxton Bragg’s victorious troops looking down upon them from high ground south of the city, Federal planners were forced to take action. While General Ulysses S. Grant was sent to take charge of Union forces in the area, the Eleventh and Twelfth Corps of the Army of the Potomac were combined into the newly designated Twentieth Corps, put under the command of Major General Joseph Hooker, and sent to relieve Chattanooga. News of this transfer reached Robert E. Lee in early October, thereby giving him the opening he needed to launch his surprise offensive on Meade’s now reduced army, which remained on the north bank of the Rapidan River. In preparing his army for a crossing of the Rapidan upstream from the Federals, Lee sent out orders to his two corps commanders, instructing them on their prospective movements. On October 8, Brigadier General John R. Cooke, whose brigade remained an independent entity within the army, also received orders directly from Lee. They read as follows: “I desire that you hold your command in readiness to move upon short notice. You will cause them to be supplied with two days cooked rations and have your teams prepared to accompany you.” Upon receipt of these

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<sup>417</sup> David Thompson, Gordonsville, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, October 4, 1863, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Leander Gwynn Hunt, Gordonsville, Virginia to Miss M.A. Conrad, Clemmonsville, North Carolina, September 29, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

instructions, Cooke received orders to march on October 9. The army's initial destination was Culpepper Court House, which lay in the vicinity of Meade's right flank.<sup>418</sup>

The Twenty-Seventh and the rest of Cooke's Brigade took to the roads on the morning of October 9. Crossing the Rapidan River somewhere near Orange Court House, the regiment followed A.P. Hill's Third Corps to Madison Court House, where they bivouacked for the night. Private Charles Watson commented on the movement in a letter to his sister: "Our whole army is moving, we started from Gordonsville this morning, we are now near Madison Courthouse...they say that the Yankee army is faling back. I don't know whether we will have any fight or not." Upon its arrival at Madison, the brigade was formally attached to Major General Henry Heth's Division of the Third Corps, in which they were destined to remain for the rest of the war. On the tenth, the regiment, along with the rest of the division, crossed the Robertson River and marched in the direction of Sperryville. According to Lieutenant Graham, "We did not get into camp till after dark that night and as the roads were bad our wagons did not come up and most of us were left without anything to eat next morning." The next day's march brought the troops to the outskirts of Culpepper Court House, Lee's first objective in this campaign.<sup>419</sup>

Unfortunately for the Confederates, and just as Private Watson had supposed, General Meade had realized his predicament and quickly withdrew his forces back across

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<sup>418</sup> Kennedy, 251; Freeman, 624; Robert E. Lee, Headquarters, Army of Northern Virginia, to Brigadier General John R. Cooke, Gordonsville, Virginia, October 8, 1863, Cooke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Sloan, 66.

<sup>419</sup> Charles J. Watson, Madison Court House, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, October 9, 1863, Charles J. Watson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 160; Sloan, 66; U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 24, Part I*, 413.

the Rappahannock River in the direction of Centreville, carefully maintaining his line of supply and retreat along the Orange and Alexandria Railroad in the process. Captain Sloan commented on this setback in his postwar history: “Just before our arrival [in Culpepper] it was ascertained that Meade was on the farther side of the Rappahannock River, which would render it necessary for our troops to make another flank movement.” Despite a difficult two-day march through rain and mud, and the crossing of two rivers, the Army of Northern Virginia had failed to surprise the enemy. Commenting on the difficult marching conditions experienced by the regiment, Assistant Surgeon Hunt told his sister, “We have had a very hard time on this trip. It rained about every other day...we had to march through mud and water every day.” As mentioned by Lieutenant Graham, the muddy roads slowed the army’s wagons, causing a shortage of rations. Upon arrival outside of Culpepper on October 11, Graham wrote, “Soon after we went into camp that evening our Reg’t was ordered out on picket and as our wagons were still behind, we had to go without anything to eat, but we left our cooks at camp and as soon as the wagons came—about 12 o’clock—we had something cooked.”<sup>420</sup>

With Meade’s army safely across the Rappahannock, Lee planned another flank movement that was designed to cut off the Federals and interpose the Army of Northern Virginia between Meade and Washington. With his own army now concentrated near Culpepper Court House, Lee ordered his two corps commanders, A.P. Hill and Richard Ewell, to cross the Rappahannock and reunite near Warrenton, which would place them

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<sup>420</sup> Sloan, 66; Leander Gwynn Hunt, Camp 27<sup>th</sup> N.C., Virginia, to his father, Yadkin County, North Carolina?, October 21, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina; Wagstaff, 160-61; Freeman, 624-25; Jordan and Manarin, 4.

astride Meade's flank and slightly in the enemy's rear. The orders were soon issued and on the morning of October 12, Cooke's Brigade, along with the rest of Hill's Corps, set out on a circuitous route towards Warrenton. Passing through Woodville, Sperryville and Gaine's Crossroads, the men of the Twenty-Seventh, covering more than twenty miles during the day, reached the village of Amissville late that evening and went into bivouac.<sup>421</sup>

After a few hours of sleep, the men were once again back on the road on the morning of the thirteenth. After utilizing Waterloo Bridge in order to cross Carter's Run, a tributary of the Rappahannock, Hill's Corps arrived near Warrenton during the afternoon and the men were allowed to rest for the evening. According to James Graham, who detailed each day's march in his letters home, "we reached Warrenton the next day [October 13] and as soon as the wagons were up we were ordered to cook two days rations immediately and be prepared to march at a moments notice." Despite the urgency of these orders, the men of the regiment were left undisturbed for the remainder of the night. By this time, Ewell's Second Corps, which had marched from Culpepper via Jeffersonton and Sulphur Springs, was also arriving near Warrenton and Lee planned to move his entire army forward in the morning, hoping to strike the railroad north of the Union army and cut its line of retreat. As Lee made these plans, Meade had sent out orders to his corps commanders during the day to retreat north along the railroad and mass near Centreville, where he planned to offer battle from a strong defensive position.

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<sup>421</sup> Freeman, 624-25; Sloan, 66; Wagstaff, 161.

As the men of the Twenty-Seventh and the rest of Cooke's Brigade slept that night, few of them could possibly have imagined what the next twenty-four hours would bring.<sup>422</sup>

During the early morning hours of October 14, the regiment prepared for the day's movement and quickly found its place in the marching column. With Heth's Division located in the center of Hill's Corps, the troops marched the five miles to the village of New Baltimore by 8:30 a.m. Utilizing the Warrenton and Alexandria Turnpike before switching to the Greenwich Road, the men of the regiment found the going relatively easy, despite the desolate nature of the countryside.<sup>423</sup> As Hill's corps advanced, with Heth's Division now in front, Ewell's troops were moving parallel to the south towards the hamlet of Auburn, where they quickly encountered resistance. Lieutenant Graham commented, "As we marched we could distinctly hear the booming of cannon and thought the enemy could not be far off." With both corps screened by elements of General J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry, Lee's plan of movement appeared to be working as of midday. They were driving the Federals before them. The question was would they be able to cut off a large portion of the Union army before it escaped north along the railroad.<sup>424</sup>

By about ten o'clock, according to Captain Sloan, "we came upon a little place called Grinage [Greenwich]. Here we found the deserted camp of the enemy. Their campfires were still burning, many articles of camp equipage were laying around,

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<sup>422</sup> Clark, 440; Wagstaff, 161; Kennedy, 251-52; Freeman, 624-25.

<sup>423</sup> The region had witnessed numerous depredations by both armies during the previous two years of war, especially during the Second Manassas Campaign; it had also been heavily stripped of food and forage by Union forces who occupied the area.

<sup>424</sup> William D. Henderson, *The Road to Bristoe Station: Campaigning with Lee and Meade, August 1-October 20, 1863*, (Lynchburg, VA: H.E. Howard, 1987), 163-65; Sloan, 66; Wagstaff, 161.

everything showing that a panic had seized them and that their retreat was hasty and terrified.” The troops retreating before Hill’s advance belonged to the Union Third Corps, which, under orders from Meade, continued falling back to the northeast several miles north of the railroad and parallel to it while the bulk of the Army of the Potomac utilized the tracks of the railroad itself. General Heth, in his official report on the campaign, commented on the movement of his division during the morning hours as well as the developing situation:

After passing through New Baltimore, and about a mile and a half or less from the village, I was directed to take a right-hand road, which proved to be a cross-road leading to Bristoe Station, via Greenwich. Just before reaching Greenwich some 20 stragglers of the Third Corps, Federal Army, were captured. A desultory fire of artillery was heard from just after daybreak, apparently on our right, and continued during the day. From Greenwich we pressed on [with Cooke’s Brigade leading] by the most direct road to Bristoe Station, picking up a number of stragglers on the road.<sup>425</sup>

On Ewell’s front, meanwhile, Confederate infantry and cavalry slowly pushed Major General Gouverneur Warren’s Second Corps back along the tracks of the Orange and Alexandria. This was the source of the firing that Heth mentioned in his report. Bristoe Station figured into Lee’s plans because it was located along the railroad just before the crossing of Broad Run. Hill and Ewell converged on Bristoe with the hope of getting to the crossing site before the enemy’s main body crossed the watercourse, thereby possibly destroying one or more Union corps in the process.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 24, Part I*, 430.

<sup>426</sup> Sloan, 66; Wagstaff, 161; Freeman, 624-25; Henderson, *Road To Bristoe Station*, 165-66; Clark, 440; Kennedy, 252-53.

As Cooke's Brigade advanced at the head of Heth's Division, the cavalry, which had been screening Hill's advance all morning, were nowhere to be seen. Instead of continuing ahead of the infantry to scout the area, Major General Fitzhugh Lee's troopers had veered to the north in pursuit of Union cavalry. With no mounted screen in front of him, Cooke was forced to deploy skirmishers to reconnoiter the road ahead. As the men advanced, they continued picking up Union stragglers and discarded equipment, which only increased the pace of the pursuit. James Graham, in his postwar history of the Twenty-Seventh, described the regiment's movements along the road to Bristoe Station: "Throwing out our skirmishers some 200 yards ahead we proceeded at a rapid pace, almost double quick, in pursuit of the foe. It was almost like a boy chasing a hare. Though the march was very rapid not a straggler left the ranks of our regiment, every man seeming in earnest and confident in the belief that we would soon overtake and capture a portion of the Federal army." By around 1:30 p.m., Hill's Corps, with Cooke's Brigade still in the lead, began arriving in the Bristoe area, fully confident that they would find a disorganized enemy in full retreat.<sup>427</sup>

Upon arrival near Bristoe, Hill, riding in the van of his Third Corps, reached a commanding height from which he could see the railroad's crossing of Broad Run. In his official report on the battle, Hill wrote: "Upon reaching the hills this side of Broad Run, and overlooking the plain on the north side, the [Union] Third Corps was discovered resting, a portion of it just commencing the march toward Manassas. I determined that no time must be lost, and hurried up Heth's Division, forming it in line of battle along the

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<sup>427</sup> Clark, 440; Henderson, 165-66.

crest of the hills and parallel to Broad Run.” As the men of Cooke’s Brigade came up quickly behind Hill, “everybody was becoming tired,” wrote Lieutenant Graham, “I saw the head of the column turning to the right of the road [and] soon found out that we were forming a line of battle and that the enemy were not far off.” Focused on attacking the enemy in his front, Hill neglected to reconnoiter his right flank. Forming south of the Milford Road, Cooke’s Brigade, having not participated in a major battle in nearly ten months and numbering roughly 2,500 men strong, was arrayed in the following order: The Forty-Eighth North Carolina formed on the left while the Twenty-Seventh, Fifteenth, and Forty-Sixth continued the line to the right in that order. The 1,500 men of Brigadier General William W. Kirkland’s Brigade, which had suffered heavy casualties at Gettysburg and was also made up exclusively of North Carolina regiments, formed on Cooke’s left. These two brigades formed Heth’s battle line as two other brigades of the division formed in reserve along the road. Once deployed, according to Heth, “orders were received from General Hill to push on with the two brigades then in line, informing me at the same time that the enemy were retreating rapidly and that expedition was necessary.” At about two o’clock, Heth ordered Cooke and Kirkland to move forward and engage the visible elements of the retreating Union Third Corps on the other side of Broad Run.<sup>428</sup>

Captain Sloan described the advance: “Advancing some five hundred yards through a dense forest of pines, we were halted near a small stream in an open field [in order to dress our lines]. About 800 yards in our front and to our left upon a hill, we

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<sup>428</sup> Henderson, 166-70; U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 24, Part I*, 426-30; Clark, 440; Wagstaff, 161; Sloan, 67.

could see several brigades of the enemy; while in the road in their front a large wagon train was hurriedly moving off.” To the men in the ranks it appeared that they would continue driving the enemy before them. While Heth and Hill concerned themselves with the retreating enemy to their front, they failed completely to keep track of the Union Second Corps retreating along the tracks of the Orange and Alexandria to their right. Ewell had been driving Warren’s troops up the railroad all day but his decision to use several back roads in order to move his divisions into position had delayed his arrival in the Bristoe area and given Warren some breathing space. By this time in the afternoon, the Union Fifth Corps was crossing Broad Run by way of the railroad bridge and Warren’s Second Corps had once again assumed the position of rear guard for the army. Deployed south of the railroad embankment, the Federals kept a wary eye to the north and dispatched skirmishers to feel for the enemy in the direction of the Milford Road, precisely the area into which Heth’s troops were now advancing.<sup>429</sup>

As Cooke and Kirkland’s brigades halted in front of Broad Run to dress their lines before continuing to the east, General Cooke received word from Colonel Edward Hall of the Forty-Sixth North Carolina that the enemy was flanking him! In his official report of the battle, Colonel Hall stated: “Being then in command of the extreme right regiment, I immediately discovered that the enemy was in heavy force on my right and busily engaged in getting in position...soon the enemy’s skirmishers commenced firing on my right flank. I sent word to General Cooke that I was much annoyed by the fire and seriously threatened.” The troops that Hall reported seeing on his right belonged to the

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<sup>429</sup> Sloan, 67-68; Kennedy, 252-53; Henderson, 166-72; Clark, 440-41; Wagstaff, 161.

First Minnesota and Fifty-Ninth New York regiments of the Second Corps, which had been dispatched as skirmishers earlier in the day. Cooke received this warning just as he was ordered by Heth to continue the advance. Relaying the situation to Generals Heth and Hill, Cooke was again ordered to advance to the front. Despite Heth's concern for his division's flank, Hill, by now completely obsessed with attacking the retreating enemy in his front and convinced that Major General Richard Anderson's Division would soon arrive to support Heth's right, ordered him once again to advance immediately. Lieutenant Graham described what happened next: "I was standing within fifteen feet of General Cooke and heard all these messages given and received. Upon this message [to advance], Cooke, with that peculiar shrug of the shoulder that he had, remarked, "Well, by God, I'll take my men in and if they outflank me I'll face my men about and cut my way out. Forward, men!" It was now perhaps 2:30 p.m. The Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, positioned in the left center of the brigade, neatly attired in their new uniforms, numbering more than 450 men, and commanded by Colonel John Gilmer, advanced with the rest of Cooke's Brigade. According to one officer of the regiment who was to survive the coming fight, "It was a beautiful October day, but it was destined to be the day when more men were killed and more blood shed in a few minutes than was ever known before."<sup>430</sup>

Predictably, as the two brigades moved forward, the pressure on Cooke's right flank increased. Seeing no sign of Anderson's Division on his right, Cooke made a

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<sup>430</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 24, Part I*, 426-35; Henderson, 170-73; Wagstaff, 161; Clark, 440-41; Sloan, 68; James A. Graham, "A Bloody Battle: 1,200 Men Killed in Forty Minutes," *Philadelphia Times*, date unknown but probably from the 1880's, this article was found in General Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Hess, 188-90.

fateful decision. Instead of continuing straight ahead, as his orders dictated, the brigadier, on his own authority, ordered his regiments to conduct a right wheel in order to confront the growing Federal threat to the south. General Kirkland, seeing Cooke's maneuver, likewise had his brigade conform to the right wheel. Soon both brigades were oriented to the south with the railroad embankment and the Union Second Corps perhaps a half mile distant. While Heth's skirmishers pushed their Union counterparts back across the open field, Confederate artillery of Pogue's and McIntosh's battalions of the Third Corps arrived on the field, took up position on several hills in front of Heth's main line, and opened fire on the enemy guns near the railroad. Passing through a skirt of pine trees and into the open field, the men of the regiment had their first view of the enemy's position. "About 800 yards in the valley in our front ran the track of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. The road here formed an embankment six or eight feet high, extending far enough to overlap our brigade and a portion of Kirkland's on our left. The space between us and the railroad was a barren, open field, descending with a gradual declivity to the railroad embankment." Such was Captain Sloan's impression of the view that met the eyes of the men of Company B. As Heth's men came into view, the Union Second Corps division of Brigadier General Alexander Webb was deployed behind the embankment but remained hidden from the Confederate's view by the height of the grade and the nature of the terrain. To Webb's rear, meanwhile, Federal artillery unlimbered along a distant tree line, from which they had an unobstructed view across the open field toward Heth's battle line and the Third Corps artillery.<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> Sloan, 68-69; Wagstaff, 161; Hess, 188-89; Henderson, 172-76.

As the artillery of both sides opened fire and the Twenty-Seventh emerged into the open, Lieutenant Graham, helping Captain Stephen Dickson control Company G, commented, "We had still seen no enemy in our immediate front, but we soon found that they were there and ready for us. Just as we passed the skirt of pines fire was opened on us by their skirmishers and from two or three batteries in the woods at the top of the opposite hill [beyond the railroad]. We still saw no enemy behind the railroad." Moving beyond the Confederate artillery positions with their skirmishers still in front, the two brigades advanced perhaps 250 yards before the enemy battle line opened fire. Together with the death dealing shells of the Federal artillery, the musketry from behind the embankment chewed into the ranks of Cooke and Kirkland's brigades. According to James Graham, "It was a gentle slope from the pines to the railroad, and as the enemy were firing up hill their bullets told well." One of the first casualties in the brigade was General Cooke, who was struck in the leg and toppled off of his horse, severely wounded. Lieutenant Graham related, "Gen. Cooke was shot from his horse just behind our Reg't." Almost immediately thereafter, Colonel Gilmer was also shot in the left leg and forced out of action. Lieutenant Colonel George Whitfield quickly took command of the regiment while Colonel Hall of the Forty-Sixth assumed charge of the brigade, which continued forward, the troops reportedly firing as they advanced.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> James Graham, "A Bloody Battle, 1,200 Men Killed in Forty Minutes," *Philadelphia Times*, date unknown but probably from the 1880's, found in General Cooke's scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Wagstaff, 162; Sloan, 69-70; Clark, 442; Henderson, 177-80; the report that the men of the regiment were firing as they advanced toward the enemy at least 250 yards away is evidence that a good portion, if not most, of the troops were most likely armed with longer range rifled-muskets by this stage of the war.

During this part of the advance, the Twenty-Seventh, “having always been trained in the quickstep,” moved slightly ahead of the rest of the brigade. This forced Lieutenant Colonel Whitfield to order a momentary halt while the other regiments caught up. After reforming their brigade front on line with Whitfield’s men several hundred yards from the embankment, the remainder of Cooke’s Brigade halted and commenced firing in earnest. With their momentum stopped, casualties accumulated quickly all along the regiment’s line as the men traded fire with the Federals who remained superbly protected by the natural breastwork of the railroad embankment. The moment of decision had arrived. According to Lieutenant Graham, “We were suffering terribly, and Lieutenant Colonel Whitfield seeing this, hurried down the line to meet Colonel Hall, who was coming up from the right, and told him that he would lose all his men if they remained where they were, and he must either move them back or make a charge.” Colonel Hall, quickly understanding Whitfield’s concern, ordered the brigade to charge. In his official report of the battle, he stated: “The brigade was then within 200 yards of the railroad...the guns on the left and rear of the railroad had an enfilading fire on us...the musketry fire from the line of the railroad was very heavy. I soon saw that a rapid advance must be made or a withdrawal. I chose the former.” As Whitfield shouted the order to continue forward, killed and wounded men continued to spill from the ranks by the dozens. One officer of the regiment commented: “The point from which we started the charge was distinctly marked; at least four, and in some cases ten, men from each company lying dead or wounded in that line.” Amazingly, Corporal William T. Sumner,

the regimental color bearer, remained standing, although no one could tell how long his luck would hold out.<sup>433</sup>

As the men of Cooke's Brigade moved forward at the double-quick, continually dressing their ranks as casualties created large gaps in the line, General Kirkland's Brigade advanced in tandem on their left. Kirkland himself had been severely wounded in the arm at almost the same instant that Cooke had been hit and Colonel Richard Singletary of the Forty-Fourth North Carolina now commanded Kirkland's Brigade. As they got closer to the embankment, "the firing was becoming still more deadly...men were falling at every step," and a thick carpet of dead and wounded marked the regiment's progress down the slope. About this time, Lieutenant Graham was struck by a spent bullet in the knee and started for the rear. As he reached a piece of high ground he "turned and saw my regiment actually slaughtered by one volley. They had reached thirty or forty yards of the railroad. The regiment seemed to me to just melt away at once." After traversing more than 150 yards at the double-quick, losing men at every step, the ranks of the Twenty-Seventh were greeted with a point-blank volley by at least one full regiment of the enemy. This fire stopped the men in their tracks and knocked scores to the ground. Lieutenant Colonel Whitfield, cheering his men on, was shot in the right leg and likewise crumpled to the ground. Corporal Sumner of Company F was killed instantly, dropping the regiment's colors. Corporal Edwin A. Barrett of the color guard quickly raised the flag, but he advanced only a few steps before a ball to his right

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<sup>433</sup> Clark, 442-43; U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 24, Part I*, 435; James Graham, "A Bloody Battle, 1,200 Men Killed in Forty Minutes," *Philadelphia Times*, date unknown but probably from the 1880's, appeared in General Cooke's scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Sloan, 70.

thigh felled him as well. Corporal William Story of Company B picked up the colors and amazingly emerged unscathed from the remainder of the battle.<sup>434</sup> The last enemy volley had taken the momentum completely out of the charge. The survivors of the regiment quickly hit the ground and returned fire. To their left and right, the remaining regiments of Cooke's Brigade likewise took cover and instinctively began edging back up the slope. On Singletary's front meanwhile, elements of his brigade managed to breach the enemy's line and engage in a brief spat of hand-to-hand fighting before being driven out by a severe enfilading fire.<sup>435</sup>

Watching the progress of his two brigades, General Heth commented, "Cooke's Brigade charged up to within 40 yards of the railroad embankment but was driven back, being exposed not only to a heavy fire from the enemy behind the railroad, but also to a fire on its right flank." Pinned down in front the enemy, the men of the regiment, who had managed to advance slightly farther than the rest of the brigade, continued to suffer casualties as they attempted to find cover on the barren slope. Captain Sloan, who had miraculously escaped injury so far, stated, "In our perilous condition but two courses were open, either to surrender or to take our chance in a retreat up the hill, the descent of which had been so disastrous. Major Webb [who had taken command of the regiment after Whitfield was wounded] chose the latter and gave the order to fall back." Still

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<sup>434</sup> For his gallantry during the action, Corporal Story was later awarded the honorary rank of Ensign; see Jordan and Manarin, 8, 29.

<sup>435</sup> Hess, 189-91; Wagstaff, 162; Henderson, 180-81; Clark, 442-43; James Graham, "A Bloody Battle, 1,200 Men Killed in Forty Minutes," *Philadelphia Times*, date unknown but probably from the 1880's, appeared in General Cooke's scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

standing in disbelief at the virtual destruction of his regiment, Lieutenant Graham continued to watch the unfolding drama; he commented:

We had to fall back up that fatal hill. The 27<sup>th</sup> had no protection of any kind. The ground was smooth and even and it seemed as if every man must be shot, but we were protected to a great extent by the gallant 15<sup>th</sup> North Carolina [to our right], who, under their able Colonel (afterwards Brigadier General) William MacRae, fell back by companies, as though on drill, and poured their fire upon the enemy, thus making a part of them, at least, keep their heads and musket barrels below the top of the embankment. The 15<sup>th</sup> had some protection by unevenness in the ground they passed over, as well as by some trees and bushes along their line. We had none, except their protecting fire.<sup>436</sup>

As the Twenty-Seventh fell back, the survivors managed to somehow rescue the wounded Lieutenant Colonel Whitfield from certain capture. Many others would not be so fortunate. Dozens of wounded and unwounded men remained pinned in front of the embankment, unable or unwilling to make it back up the slope with the rest of the regiment. In his report of the battle, Colonel Hall commented, “The Twenty-seventh North Carolina fell back in an honorable confusion, from the fact that between one-half and two-thirds of the regiment had been killed or wounded, they being in a far more exposed position than the other regiments and having gone farther.” Retreating back across the field proved to be a deadly endeavor and, “as it was, our loss was severe.” One soldier in Company H, who had worn his old uniform into battle while keeping his new prized English jacket and trousers in his knapsack, “finding his knapsack too heavy and fearing he would have to throw it away and lose his new clothes, stopped about half way up the hill, [ignoring the fire] threw off his knapsack, opened it, jerked off his old

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<sup>436</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 24, Part I*, 431; Sloan, 70-71; James Graham, “A Bloody Battle, 1,200 Men Killed in Forty Minutes,” *Philadelphia Times*, date unknown but probably from the 1880’s, appeared in General Cooke’s scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

clothes, donned his new ones and then continued his trot up the hill.” Meeting back up with what remained of the regiment as it passed his position, James Graham wrote, “We fell back beyond the brow of the hill and immediately reformed...it was the hottest place I ever saw. Sharpsburg was not near so hot...I never saw troops fight better than our Reg’t. did.” It was now perhaps 3:30 at the latest. At most the severest part of the battle had lasted barely thirty to forty minutes. In that short space of time, however, the regiment, as well as the rest of Heth’s two brigades, had been savagely mauled by concentrated artillery and musketry fire. The result was a failed attack and extremely heavy Confederate casualties.<sup>437</sup>

As Colonel Hall reorganized the remnants of Cooke’s Brigade near the attack’s jumping off point, roughly 600 yards north of the railroad, one of McIntosh’s batteries found itself left behind in the open field. The battery had been ordered forward by A.P. Hill without the knowledge of General Heth or his brigade commanders. As a result, no one noticed the five Confederate guns sitting exposed in the middle of the field. Almost immediately, Union troops sortied from behind the railroad embankment and made a dash for the unprotected guns. Without infantry support, the cannon and much of the battery’s crew were captured. Lieutenant Graham wrote about the incident in a letter to his father: “About the time we commenced to fall back one of our batteries came in, but nobody in our Reg’t. and very few in the Brigade knew anything about it. This was the battery that was lost. Our brigade was blamed for the loss of this battery, but we ought

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<sup>437</sup> Clark, 443; Sloan, 71; James Graham, “A Bloody Battle, 1,200 Men Killed in Forty Minutes,” *Philadelphia Times*, date unknown but probably from the 1880’s, appeared in General Cooke’s scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; U.S. War Department, *OR*, Vol. 24, Part I, 435; Henderson, 181-83; Hess, 191; Wagstaff, 157-58, 162.

not to have been and I understand that now the thing is becoming more clear and the blame has shifted.” In commenting on the loss of the battery, General Heth, whose horse had been shot from under him during the battle, simply stated, “During the advance a battery belonging to McIntosh’s battalion was ordered to take position on a hill [between Cooke and Kirkland’s brigades]. This battery was captured by the enemy. I was ignorant of the fact that a battery had been ordered to occupy this position until it had been taken.” With the attack over and the Federal Second Corps well entrenched along the railroad, no additional Confederate attacks were launched during the day although most of the Second and Third Corps took up positions within sight of the bloody railroad embankment. Despite a severe artillery bombardment that lasted much of the afternoon and evening, both sides seemed content to improve their positions and await the other’s move. After moving to the rear of Heth’s new battle line, Cooke and Kirkland’s brigades reformed their shattered ranks and rested in comparative safety, still shocked by the horror that they had just been through and contemplating the losses they had suffered in such a short space of time.<sup>438</sup>

During the attack, which had lasted less than one hour, Heth’s two brigades had suffered nearly 1,300 casualties out of 4,000 men engaged, a loss rate of nearly thirty percent. Cooke’s Brigade lost some 700 men while Kirkland’s Brigade, still smarting from its severe losses at Gettysburg, suffered nearly 600 casualties. In a manner eerily similar to the famed Picket-Pettigrew charge of July 3, Heth’s men had been beaten back by an entrenched foe and inflicted far fewer casualties than they received. The Federal

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<sup>438</sup> Wagstaff, 162; U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 24, Part I*, 431; Henderson, 185-90.

division of General Alexander Webb, the primary target of the attack, suffered fewer than 500 casualties out of more than 3,000 men engaged.<sup>439</sup>

Despite the shortness of the fight, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina had suffered severe casualties, more than any other regiment involved and comparable to the regiment's sacrifice at Sharpsburg nearly one year earlier. To begin with, the regiment's colonel and lieutenant colonel were both severely wounded. Despite a lengthy convalescence, Colonel Gilmer would never return to duty. Lieutenant Colonel Whitfield, on the other hand, eventually recovered enough to rejoin the regiment. Of the ten company commanders, six were wounded, two of them mortally, while numerous junior officers and non-commissioned officers were likewise struck down or captured. Among those suffering mortal wounds was Sergeant Major Robert Weatherly, who died in Richmond on October 24. Sergeant Thaddeus Pittman of Company A was quickly promoted to replace him. There is some discrepancy between sources as to the exact number of casualties suffered by the regiment, but suffice it to say that at least fifty percent of the men and most of the officers were killed, wounded or captured, many of them during the final rush towards the railroad embankment. Dr. L. Guild, the Medical Director for the Army of Northern Virginia, stated in his final report of the battle that the regiment suffered thirty men killed and 174 wounded. The report fails to provide a list of those captured or missing, however, and must therefore be considered incomplete. Immediately after the battle, numerous soldiers described the regiment's losses to loved ones at home and tried to convey the destructiveness of the battle. Lieutenant Graham,

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<sup>439</sup> Henderson, 182-83; Clark, 443; Hess, 192; in an interesting twist of fate, Kirkland's and Webb's troops had faced each other at Gettysburg during the climax of Lee's last attack on Cemetery Ridge.

despite a slight wound to his knee, wrote home that “Our Reg’t. lost about 300 men,” while Assistant Surgeon Hunt, provided with a more direct appreciation of the casualties, stated, “We went into the fight with about four hundred and fifty men and came out with some less than a hundred and fifty; my report of the killed and wounded is two hundred and six besides a great many I have not seen.”<sup>440</sup> Contrary to these numbers, the author, by analyzing a detailed roster of the regiment’s companies, can verify by name 209 total casualties. This number includes: forty-eight men killed or mortally wounded, ninety-five wounded, and sixty-six men captured, only six of whom were disabled by wounds. Given the discrepancy between these sources, it is possible that the true number of casualties suffered by the regiment lies somewhere in the middle, between the extremes of high and low numbers. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the regiment accounted for more than one-third of the losses suffered by Cooke’s Brigade.<sup>441</sup>

Whatever the exact numbers, the individual companies’ losses attest to the determination and discipline of the regiment during the deadly charge, in which they had advanced farther than any other regiment in the brigade despite the heavy fire being poured into their ranks. In terms of sheer numbers, companies B and G were the hardest hit. Company B had gone into the fight with sixty-three officers and men. The company suffered at least forty-two casualties including nine killed or mortally wounded, twenty wounded and thirteen captured. Included in this number was First Lieutenant John H.

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<sup>440</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 24, Part I*, 413; Wagstaff, 162; Leander Gwynn Hunt, Camp 27<sup>th</sup> N.C., Virginia, to his father, Yadkin County, North Carolina, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

<sup>441</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98; The relatively low number of wounded compared with those who died as a result of the battle may be some cause to believe that these confirmed numbers are too low, for Civil War battles usually produced a much higher rate of wounded to killed than this analysis shows.

McKnight who suffered a mortal wound and died in the hands of the enemy. Entering the fight with sixty-five officers and enlisted men, Company G was most likely the largest company within the regiment during the battle. By the end of the day, the company mustered fewer than twenty men present for duty. Forty-six officers and soldiers had become casualties including eight dead, twenty-three wounded, two of whom were captured on the field, and fifteen unwounded prisoners. Captain Stephen Dickson had been severely wounded in the right lung while Second Lieutenant Robert Patterson was shot through the abdomen and First Lieutenant James Graham had been slightly wounded in the knee by a spent bullet. Dickson and Graham would return to duty in time while Patterson was eventually discharged for disability. As an example of the destructiveness and rapidity of the Federal fire, one man from Company G, Private William Thompson, was simultaneously wounded in the shoulder, leg, jaw, both arms and left side. Miraculously, he survived his wounds and even returned to duty within several months.<sup>442</sup>

Company F sustained at least twenty-five casualties including Captain Thomas Jones mortally wounded, Second Lieutenant William Mebane captured, and Third Lieutenant Francis Nixon badly wounded in the right leg, a wound that would eventually require his discharge from service. Company A suffered approximately twenty casualties including six killed or mortally wounded, nine wounded and five captured. Included in this total were Captain James D. Bryan, who died after the amputation of his right leg,

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<sup>442</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 8-98; Sloan, 72-73; James Graham, "A Bloody Battle, 1,200 Men Killed in Forty Minutes," *Philadelphia Times*, date unknown but probably from the 1880's, appeared in General Cooke's scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

and Second Lieutenant Joel Denmark, who was killed instantly on the field. First Lieutenant Kenneth Jones, who returned to the company from furlough just days after the battle, listed Company I's casualties as "four killed, 11 wounded, 2 prisoners and 4 missing." In the five remaining companies, confirmed casualties were not as heavy, numbering fewer than fifteen, although this number included numerous officers and non-commissioned officers who would have to be replaced. Company D's commander, Captain Calvin Herring, was severely wounded and would not return to duty for several months while Second Lieutenant James Tyer of Company E was killed in action. Captain Joseph Williams of Company H was mortally wounded in the abdomen while Third Lieutenant Gabriel Johnson of Company K fell dead during the regiment's charge. Overall, the ranks of the Twenty-Seventh had been devastated by the short but brutal battle of Bristoe Station. In terms of the loss of officers, weeks and months would pass before most companies succeeded in replacing their vacant leadership positions with returned convalescents and newly elected officers and non-commissioned officers.<sup>443</sup>

Now led by Major Joseph Webb, the survivors of the regiment tried to sleep that night with the knowledge that so many of their comrades were now gone. To add to the misery of the troops, a heavy rain began to fall shortly after nightfall, which continued for several days. Under cover of the dark and rainy night, Warren's troops slipped across Broad Run and continued their retreat toward Centreville unmolested. By morning, the entire Union Army of the Potomac had escaped from Lee's grasp. The campaign, which had begun with such promise less than a week before had now ended in failure for the

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<sup>443</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 7; Jordan and Manarin; 7-98.

Confederates. Many in the ranks, and throughout the Confederacy, blamed General Hill for the disaster affecting Cooke and Kirkland's brigades at Bristoe Station. Angered by the great loss suffered by his regiment, Assistant Surgeon Hunt commented, "Some one is to blame...I don't know who it is [but] A.P. Hill actually ought to have known that the yankees were there in heavy force and should have known better than to send only two brigades into the attack." Captain Sloan, possibly exaggerating the facts but truthfully revealing his resentment, likewise wrote, "A worse managed affair than this fight at Bristoe Station did not take place during the war...Cooke's and Kirkland's brigades were made to fight this battle alone." In his memoirs, General Heth wrote of Lee and Hill's response to the defeat, he stated: "[On] October 15, General Lee, General Hill and I rode over the field; Hill was explaining to General Lee the attack made by my division the day previous. Hill assumed all the responsibility of the attack. General Lee's only remark was, addressing Hill, "Well, General, bury these poor men and let us say no more about it."<sup>444</sup>

Despite the initial blame laid upon Cooke's Brigade and the Twenty-Seventh for the repulse and the loss of the exposed battery, the reports of General Heth and Colonel Hall quickly set the record straight. In the official report of his division's actions at Bristoe Station, Heth stated:

I deem it just to the troops commanded by Generals Cooke and Kirkland to say that all behaved well under the circumstances...the position occupied by the enemy was as strong, or stronger, than military art could have made it by many hours work. No military man who has examined

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<sup>444</sup> Henderson, 190-91; Sloan, 74; Leander Gwynn Hunt, Camp 27<sup>th</sup> N.C., Virginia, to his father, Yadkin County, North Carolina?, October 21, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina; James L. Morrison, ed., *The Memoirs of Henry Heth*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), 180; Freeman, 627.

the ground, or who understands the position and the disproportionate number of the contending forces, would attach blame to these two brigades for meeting with a repulse. My confidence in these troops is not shaken by the result and I feel satisfied on fields to come they will vindicate the high reputation they have gained on many a hard-fought battlefield.

Colonel Hall, who had witnessed the men's courage and determination first hand, reported: "I have been with the brigade during some of the heaviest engagements of the war, and have never seen the men more cool and determined, and that their falling back resulted from no fault of theirs, but from the great superiority in number and position of the enemy, and the entire want of support of our lines."<sup>445</sup> Any future critics of the regiment's actions at Bristoe Station need but look at the casualties suffered to understand their error in judgment.

As the rain fell on October 15, the shattered ranks of the Twenty-Seventh were kept "busy burying the dead [while] the wounded were cared for and carried off in ambulances and wagons." Most of the regiment's wounded were sent to Confederate hospitals in Richmond and Charlottesville as quickly as transportation could be arranged. Private David Thompson, the avid letter writer, had been slightly wounded by several spent bullets. From his bed in Winder Hospital in Richmond, he wrote his sister, "[There are] some more of my Co. here...Fred Clark, Samuel Lockhart, and Sid Strayhorn is in the ward with me." From Thompson's letters, as well as several written by the wounded Private Lockhart of the same company, it is obvious that a good number of the regiment's wounded were treated at Winder Hospital before being sent back to the army or home on medical furlough. Many of the more than sixty men captured by the enemy found

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<sup>445</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 24, Part I*, 432, 436; Wagstaff, 158, 162.

themselves temporarily held at Old Capital Prison in Washington before being transferred to Point Lookout, Maryland for long term confinement. Some of these prisoners would be exchanged in the spring of 1864, but many would not return to the regiment until February of 1865, only a few months before the end of the war. At least nine of the regiment's captives from Bristoe Station died of disease while confined at Point Lookout.<sup>446</sup>

With General Cooke out of action for the foreseeable future, Colonel Hall continued to lead the brigade in the weeks and months after the battle. Beginning on October 16, the Army of Northern Virginia withdrew south towards the Rappahannock River, tearing up the tracks of the railroad as they retreated in order to deny its use to the enemy. As they worked, the rain continued falling on a daily basis, making life miserable for the troops. Describing the regiment's situation to his sister, Private William Hunt of Company B wrote, "it commenced raining three or four days without stopping any length of time and we had to be at work all the time taring up the Railroad from Bristoe Station to [Rappahannock Station]." After crossing the river on October 19, the regiment went into camp near Brandy Station. Lieutenant Graham, now in command of Company G and still bothered by the slight wound to his knee, commented on October 21, "We are camped about a mile or two south of the Rappahannock river near the Orange and Alexandria Rail Road. I think it very likely that we will stay in this section for some time, for the Yankees will hardly attempt a forward movement soon as the R.R. is torn up

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<sup>446</sup> Sloan, 74; Clark, 444; David Thompson, Winder Hospital, Richmond, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, November 2, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

from this place to Manassas and winter will soon be here.” Writing to his mother a few days later, Graham told of how the regiment had a number of tent flies which provided some cover from the drizzling rain and cold wind: “We are a great deal better off than most of the other Reg’ts in this respect; for but very few of them have any tents or flies at all. Last year at this time we were like the rest of the army, without tents and may consider ourselves very fortunate to have any this year.”<sup>447</sup>

As the survivors of Cooke’s Brigade sat in camp during the closing week of October, only occasional picket duty, during which the men were fully exposed to the wet and cold, provided any break from the monotonous inactivity of camp. A rumor quickly made the rounds that the brigade would soon be sent to Tennessee to join Bragg’s army, but it proved to be nothing more than a rumor. On the twenty-fifth, Major Webb ordered a regimental inspection but it could have done little to boost morale as it merely showcased how many officers and men were now missing from the ranks. By the end of the month, the regiment had moved its camp about three miles in order to obtain a better supply of wood. Lieutenant Graham probably voiced the opinion of many in the Twenty-Seventh when, on November 1, he wrote, “We moved our camp yesterday morning in a rain and are now in a great deal better place than our last camp... While we were around Taylorsville and Richmond I was very anxious to get with the main army, but now, that

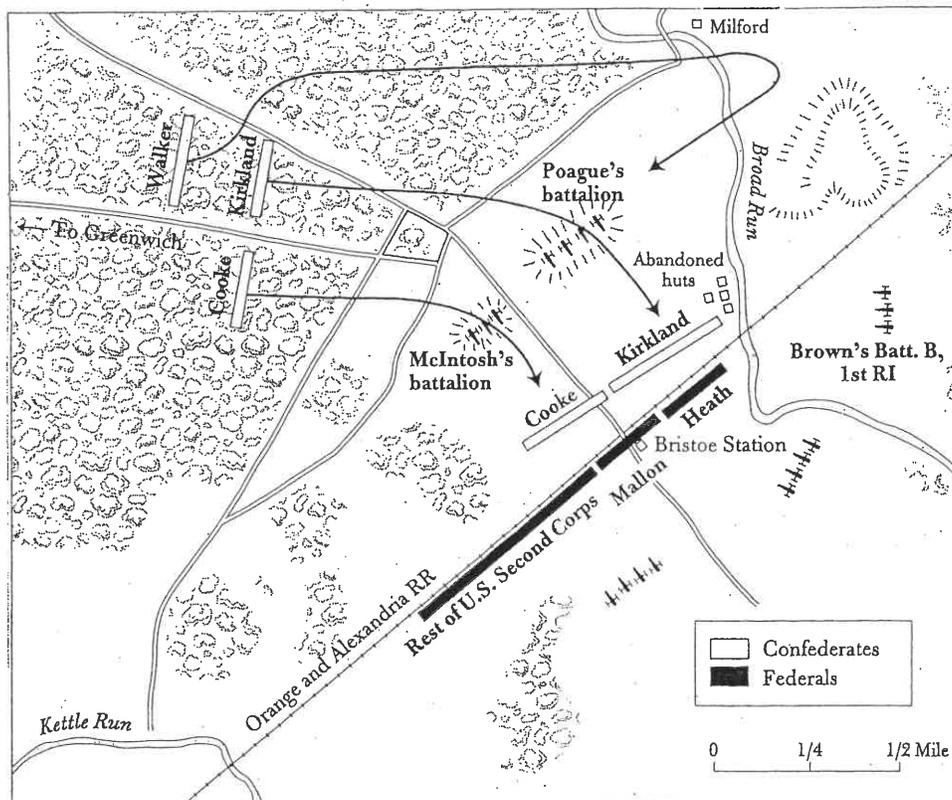
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<sup>447</sup> William Hunt, Brandy Station, Virginia, to his sister, Yadkin County, North Carolina?, October 26, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina; Sloan, 74; Wagstaff, 158-59; Freeman, 625.

we are with it, I would be very willing to be detached from it and sent back to Taylorsville or Fredericksburg again.”<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 8; William Hunt, Brandy Station, Virginia, to his sister, Yadkin County, North Carolina?, October 26, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina; Wagstaff, 164-65.



The Battle of Bristoe Station, October 14, 1863<sup>449</sup>

<sup>449</sup> Hess, 190.

## Chapter 9—November, 1863-April, 1864

**“The majority of the Regt were determined not to be behind all the other Regts. from N.C. but with the head where she always is in time of danger...we were determined to fight to the last, and if necessary to die for our liberties, our rights.”**  
**- First Lieutenant Kenneth Jones, Company I<sup>450</sup>**

With Lee’s army back on the south bank of the Rappahannock River, the Army of the Potomac initiated a counterattack during the first week of November. On the seventh, while the men of Cooke’s Brigade continued fixing up their sparse camp and sending out various picket detachments, Union troops attacked the Confederate river defenses at Kelly’s Ford, downstream from Rappahannock Station. Quickly overwhelming the defenders, the Federals managed to capture hundreds of troops from Ewell’s Second Corps and secure the crossing site for further operations. This defeat, combined with the fact that Meade had managed to rebuild the Orange and Alexandria Railroad from Manassas to the Rappahannock River, made the line of the Rappahannock untenable for the Confederates and forced Lee to withdraw his army south across the Rapidan.<sup>451</sup>

At 3:30 a.m. on the morning of November 8, the soldiers of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina were roused from their slumbers and began a hurried march south in the direction of Culpepper Court House. Expecting an attack at any moment, the regiment, according to Lieutenant James Graham, was “drawn up in line of battle at this place and laid in line all Sunday [November 8] waiting for the enemy to approach.” Later that night, Cooke’s Brigade “started again and after marching nearly all night, over one of the

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<sup>450</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, 19-20.

<sup>451</sup> Hess, 196; Freeman, 625, 633-35.

roughest roads I ever saw, crossed the Robertson River about 4 o'clock in the morning and went into camp." Despite covering nearly sixteen miles during the night, the men were once again awoken on the morning of the ninth and continued the march south as a light snow greeted the marching column. Lieutenant Kenneth Jones of Company I described the march in his diary: "At ½ 8 AM commenced the march...crossed the Rapidan R about 3 PM...Cooke's Brig in the rear...marched 1 1/2 miles and struck camp." Now safely ensconced along the south bank of the Rapidan, Lee's army went into camp and set about picketing the new dividing line between themselves and the Federals, who seemed content to occupy the ground vacated by the Confederates.<sup>452</sup>

With their position secure, the men of the regiment made themselves as comfortable as possible in their new camp, which was located several miles northeast of Orange Court House near the railroad depot of Rapidan Station. Lieutenant Graham, commanding Company G, wrote home in mid November, "I hope that we will stay in this camp sometime, for I have fixed up comfortably again having built a chimney to my tent and made a table and some stools. You just ought to see how snugly I am fixed up." Although the rank and file did not possess such luxuries as Graham mentioned, most of the men in the regiment had at least some cover from the elements, in this case tent flaps, while they awaited the order to build more permanent winter huts. Picket duty took up much of the regiment's time during November as the various units of Heth's Division rotated duty every forty-eight hours. Under this system, each regiment remained two

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<sup>452</sup> Wagstaff, 165-66; Sloan, 74-75; Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 9-10.

entire days on picket without much of a chance for rest or comfort. Exposed to cold temperatures as well as occasional rain and snow showers, the troops spent many a miserable night watching the crossing points along the Rapidan.<sup>453</sup>

Lieutenant Jones described one such outing in mid-November in which the entire regiment crossed the river and even briefly confronted the enemy:

November 13: At 5 PM recd orders to report to Coln Walker on the other side of the Rapidan R by 8 o'clock the next morning for 48 hours picket duty. November 14: Formed line by 6 o'clock AM, marched across the [Rapidan River RR] Bridge, and reported by 8, formed in picket line by 9...quiet during the day, very hard rain during the night. November 15: The enemy made their appearance about ½ 10 o'clock AM Fired into our pickets a few times and retired to their camp. Nothing more of interest during the day. November 16: Relieved by 44<sup>th</sup> NC at ½ 8 o'clock...marched back to camp, still under orders to keep 2 days rations cooked.

In describing this particular stint of picket duty, Lieutenant Graham commented, "I had only slept four hours in forty eight having been on picket for that length of time. We had a pretty rough time of it on picket Saturday night as it rained nearly all night and we had no shelter, but had to stand and take it. The Yankee cavalry came up within sight of us on Sunday and took a few shots at us, but stayed too far off to hurt any of us."<sup>454</sup>

Back in camp, the regiment was inspected by the Inspector General of the Army of Northern Virginia on November 20, an event which no doubt necessitated a great deal of clean up by the men, who would continue to wear the English made uniforms they had been issued in early October for the remainder of the year. During the next few days, the troops prepared themselves for a rumored review of Cooke's Brigade by President

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<sup>453</sup> Hess, 196; Wagstaff, 159, 167.

<sup>454</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 10-11; Wagstaff, 167.

Jefferson Davis on the twenty-fifth. When the president returned to Richmond earlier than expected, the review was cancelled. Instead, the regiment was sent to relieve the Fifty-Fifth North Carolina on the picket line near Patersford on the afternoon of November 26. Ominously for the men in the ranks, their stint on guard was cut short later that night, when, according to Lieutenant Jones, “at 12 o’clock [we] recd orders to return to camp and be ready to march by 4 o’clock [AM].” Just before leaving their posts, the men of the regiment were issued “rations of hard bread and bacon,” an indication that some kind of movement was about to take place. Unknown to anyone in the regiment, and despite the adverse weather conditions, a new Union offensive was now underway along the Rapidan River and the entire Army of Northern Virginia was soon on the way to confront it.<sup>455</sup>

With his victories at Bristoe Station and Kelly’s Ford, General Meade was determined to keep the pressure on Lee’s army. Prodded by President Lincoln to mount another offensive before winter set in, Meade decided to cross the Rapidan downstream from the Confederate defenses, push west along the Orange Turnpike and Orange Plank Road, cross the eminently defensible Mine Run, and slam into Lee’s right flank, hopefully before the Confederates could react. The Union movement began on November 24 but was delayed by heavy rain and a difficult crossing of the Rapidan two days later. By the evening of the twenty-sixth, the Army of Northern Virginia knew of the Union offensive and began laying plans to combat it. Possessing fewer than 45,000

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<sup>455</sup> Wagstaff, 168-70; Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 11-12.

troops compared with Meade's 70,000, Lee, whose army was spread out nearly thirty miles along the river, quickly realized that the banks of Mine Run offered him his only chance of stopping the Federals. On the morning of November 27, Richard Ewell's Second Corps, temporarily commanded by Major General Jubal Early, and A.P. Hill's Third Corps moved east from their camps in the vicinity of Orange Court House to confront the enemy.<sup>456</sup>

By 4:00 a.m., Major Webb, still recovering from a bout of sickness, had the regiment formed in marching column on the Orange Plank Road and moving east at a brisk pace along with the rest of Heth's Division. Captain Sloan, at the head of Company B, commented, "At the dawn of day on the 27<sup>th</sup>, we were on our way to meet Meade's army. The weather was intensely cold, and our men suffered greatly." Despite the cold temperatures and partially frozen ground, the troops covered many miles before noon. According to Lieutenant Graham, "We marched pretty rapidly till about 12 or 1 o'clock when we came to where our Cavalry had engaged the Yankees, about 14 miles from Orange C.H." Determined to engage the enemy before they reached Mine Run and allow his own army to arrive in strength, Lee ordered Heth's Division to cross the watercourse and delay the Federals as long as possible. Similar orders went out to several of Early's divisions. As Heth's Division approached elements of the Union Fifth Corps, perhaps two miles east of Mine Run, intense skirmishing erupted on both sides of the Plank Road. Although not directly engaged with the enemy, the regiment "advanced in line to within a few hundred yards of where our first line was engaged and were subjected to a pretty

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<sup>456</sup> Hess, 196; Kennedy, 255-58; Freeman, 635-36; Longstreet's First Corps was still on detached duty in Tennessee at this time.

severe shelling, losing 1 man killed and 5 or 6 wounded.” Heth and Early’s advance during the afternoon bought enough time for the rest of the army to arrive on the battlefield as night fell, thereby denying the Federals the element of surprise as well as ensuring that Mine Run remained in Confederate hands. After dark, Cooke’s Brigade, as well as the rest of the division, “fell back [about] 11/2 mile and camped.” The men got by without the benefit of shelter as the regiment’s tent flaps had been left behind in camp.<sup>457</sup>

On the morning of the twenty-eighth, according to James Graham, “the whole of our troops moved back about a mile and a half to a better position. Our division was in the second line and as we were in the woods we threw up a breast work of logs to protect us from the balls and shell that would come over the first line.” Along with the rest of the army, Heth’s Division was now situated on the west side of Mine Run and in an excellent defensive position, made even more secure by the addition of substantial log and dirt breastworks that were erected by the troops practically overnight. Captain Sloan remembered: “On Saturday [November 28], a position was selected on the line of Mine Run, and in a short while we were strongly entrenched, and anxious for the enemy to attack us.” As Meade probed Lee’s new defenses for a non-existent weak point to attack, the men of the Twenty-Seventh found themselves in reserve, moving from one place to another along the line and constantly erecting new earthworks at each location. In his diary entries for November 28 and 29, Lieutenant Jones provided some detail of these

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<sup>457</sup> Sloan, 75; Wagstaff, 169-71; Hess, 196-97; Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 12-13.

movements: “Nov 28: at day light formed line march in the direction of Mechanicsville, 2 miles formed line of battle threw up a work. Then moved to another position threw up a work and camped for the night. Nov 29: Moved at 8 o’clock to another position threw up a work, and awaited till night when we were moved again where we remained till next morning.” Lieutenant Graham described the men’s feats of digging in a letter to his father: “We had no tools except one axe to each company and made spades of plank. These answered the purpose very well and it took us but a very short time to make a very good entrenchment, for every man worked hard.” In this way, the men of the regiment passed the time until December 2, all the while expecting and hoping for an enemy attack at any moment.<sup>458</sup>

That attack would never come. Despite several probes of the new Confederate line and preparations for a massive assault on the morning of November 30, Meade was finally convinced by General Gouverneur Warren of the Union Second Corps that an attack against Lee’s entrenchments would prove a costly failure, perhaps worse than Fredericksburg. The Confederate defenses were simply too strong to attack successfully. Other than sporadic skirmishing and artillery fire, the lines remained largely static until the night of December 1, when the entire Army of the Potomac fell back across the Rappahannock in preparation for settling into winter quarters. Meade had not allowed himself to be forced into attacking an impossible position, as had Burnside a year before. Lee, believing that Meade would attack him, and looking forward to an easy defensive victory,

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<sup>458</sup> Wagstaff, 171-72; Sloan, 75; Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 13; Hess, 197-98; Kennedy, 258; Clark, 444.

refused to take the offensive himself, even though a possible opening for an attack existed on the Union left flank. On the morning of the second, Confederate pickets discovered that the Federals had evacuated their lines. Lee's opportunity had slipped away. Lieutenant Graham described the situation confronting the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh that morning:

Wednesday morning [December 2] about daylight I was ordered out on picket with my company. As soon as it was light enough to see well we found that the Yankee pickets were not on post. The picket line was then deployed as skirmishers and ordered forward. When we advanced we found the Yankees gone and on advancing about a mile we found their breastworks but could find no Yankees except four whom we captured. We sent out scouts about  $\frac{3}{4}$  a mile ahead and they could find no Yanks, but learned from an old man that they had left during the night.<sup>459</sup>

Despite the absence of a major battle, the Confederates had defeated this new Union advance and prevented any renewed Federal action in Virginia for the winter. The cost of the campaign in terms of casualties was relatively minor. The Confederates lost nearly 800 men while the Federals suffered roughly 1,600 casualties. As previously mentioned, the Twenty-Seventh apparently lost one man killed and several wounded. Many Confederates were disappointed that the enemy had not attacked their earthworks. General Heth, whose division manned the right end of Lee's line and would therefore have been in the path of Warren's troops had they attacked, commented, "Had Warren attacked, his left and left center would have met my division. I was hoping he would attack; in order that I might square accounts with him for his treatment of me at Bristoe Station." Others saw the Federal refusal to attack as a sign of weakness. James Graham

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<sup>459</sup> Wagstaff, 172; Kennedy, 258-59; Hess, 197-98; Sloan, 75; Clark, 444-45.

wrote his father, "I was very much surprised that we did not have a fight and think it a clear back down on the Yankee side."<sup>460</sup>

Despite little fighting and few casualties, the men of the regiment had suffered greatly during the brief campaign. The extremely cold and wet weather had made life miserable for the troops as they exerted nearly all their energy in constructing earthworks and standing ready to receive the enemy's attack. In the same letter quoted above, Graham stated, "The weather was very cold during the whole trip and the ground was frozen nearly all the time...On Monday night the water froze in our canteens hanging around our necks. It was the coldest and roughest time I have had yet and I have a pretty bad cold now as the effects of it. I think the Campaign is over and I certainly hope so, for I would not like to take such a trip again soon." In his official report on the campaign, Robert E. Lee himself commented on the many sufferings endured by his victorious army:

The conduct of both officers and men throughout these operations deserves the highest commendation. The promptness with which they marched to meet the enemy, their uncomplaining fortitude while lying in line of battle for five days exposed without shelter to a drenching storm, followed by intense cold, and their steadiness and cheerful resolution in anticipation of an attack, could not have been excelled.

During the afternoon of the second, the men of Cooke's Brigade, as well as most of the rest of the army, continued the pursuit of the enemy to their crossing points along the Rapidan, still hoping to inflict greater damage on the foe. Finding that all but a handful of Federal stragglers had escaped, the brigade was ordered to the rear. According to

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<sup>460</sup> Morrison, ed., *Memoirs of Henry Heth*, 180; Wagstaff, 172; Kennedy, 259.

Lieutenant Jones, “We remained where we were until ½ 4 PM when we marched [back] to the Plank road and camped for the night.”<sup>461</sup>

On the morning of December 3, the men of the Twenty-Seventh retraced their steps back along the Orange Plank Road to their previous camp near the Rapidan. Kenneth Jones remembered the march: “[we] formed line at daylight and marched in the direction of O C House...we arrived at our old camp about sun set.” Once back in camp, the regiment slowly recovered from its exertions of the previous week and settled into the routine of picket duty interspersed with lengthy bouts of inactivity. James Graham spoke for many officers and men when he stated: “We are back in our old camp and have almost recovered from our colds which we caught on the last march or rather “freeze out.” I am in hopes that we will remain quiet for the rest of the winter, for it is very rough lieing out such weather as we have had lately...Everything is as quiet and boring as can be.” In terms of the lack of activity, Lieutenant Jones recorded the regiment’s uneventful rotation on picket duty for December 8-9 as follows: “Dec 8: went on picket for 24 hours on the north side of the Rapidan [River] near the RR bridge, nothing of interest. Dec 9: were relieved at 4 PM arrived at camp after dark.” One interesting development that took place during this time was the formation of a provisional sharpshooter company within the Twenty-Seventh.<sup>462</sup> Selecting the best shots from each company in the regiment, the elite group would be charged with skirmish duties and as an

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<sup>461</sup> Wagstaff, 172; Dowdey, 636; Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 14.

<sup>462</sup> This sharpshooter company could be combined with other such companies from the brigade to form a provisional sharpshooter battalion, by fall of 1864 most brigades in the ANV had formed a sharpshooter battalion for skirmish duty and special missions.

added bonus would be exempt from most routine guard details. Lieutenant Jones, who initially took command of the organization, described its formation: "Dec 14: Orders for a detail of 40 men and 5 Sergts. 4 from Co. [I] to be made to act as sharp shooters, and Lt. K.R. Jones put in comd of them."<sup>463</sup>

Despite the progressively colder weather of mid December, Cooke's Brigade was not yet allowed to erect permanent winter quarters. Instead, the men utilized whatever shelter was available including their canvas tent flies and blankets as well as logs, brush and leaves to ward off the chill. Private David Thompson of Company G, just returned from the hospital and basically recovered from his Bristoe Station wounds, described the regiment's temporary campsite: "I found them on top of a hill in among the stumps and brush in little log piles two and three [feet high?]...Fred and myself haven't built one yet, we have raked up some leaves and stretched a blanket until we could build one, we will get some more flies in a few days." Compared with the enlisted men, the regiment's officers lived a much more comfortable existence during this time. Lieutenant Graham commented on his accommodations in a December 21 letter to his father: "The weather has been pretty cold for some time past and I think the last three or four days as cold as I ever felt. [However], as I have a good fire place to my tent I am very comfortably fixed." Unknown to the rank and file, these temporary shelters would provide their only comfort until the brigade moved to a new camp in early February when the men were finally able to construct sturdier and warmer winter huts. The reason for this delay is not altogether

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<sup>463</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 14-15; Wagstaff, 173; David Thompson, Camp near Orange Court House, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, January 25, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

clear but it definitely revolved around the need for the troops to continue picketing the river until they could be relieved and sent further back towards Orange Court House for the winter. Despite these harsh living conditions and the miserable weather, morale remained relatively high as the holidays approached.<sup>464</sup>

With Christmas approaching and the possibility of furloughs home very remote, many officers and soldiers looked forward to the delivery of special boxes from home. Since the beginning of the war, troops had supplemented their rations with delicacies sent by their mothers, sisters or wives. Christmas of 1863, the third such holiday many soldiers had spent in the army, was no exception. Given the poor rations issued to the troops at this time, which Private William Hunt of Company B described as “a half pound of pickled beef and half of that bone,” many soldiers requested extra food from home. Private Thompson asked his mother to “send me a opossum some time when [you] send me a box [and] cook it before sending it.” Most soldiers, however, did not ask for such unusual fare but rather requested items such as butter, lard, eggs, and dried fruit. In Company G, the men eagerly awaited the arrival of their boxes. Lieutenant Graham commented, “We are all anxiously awaiting Walter Thompson and his boxes. I hope he will bring my box through safe, for I am anticipating a fine time when he comes.”<sup>465</sup>

Come Christmas, most in the regiment did apparently receive something special from

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<sup>464</sup> David Thompson, Camp near Orange Court House, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, December 11, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 174; Clark, 445.

<sup>465</sup> William Hunt, Orange Court House, Virginia, to his sister, Yadkin County, North Carolina?, December 28, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina; David Thompson, Camp near Orange Court House, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, December 11, 1863, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 173.

home; especially popular were the makings for eggnog. Assistant Surgeon Hunt described the celebration in camp on Christmas Eve: “I think I enjoyed myself as much last night as I did in my life, we had quite a jolly crowd. We had some eggnog enough for all...[But] I hope this will be the last Christmas I have to spend in camp.” Showing that the men enjoyed themselves as much as possible, given the rough camp and cold weather, Private Thompson commented, “This Christmas was a very dull one in camp; all that we had was eating the contents of our boxes [and] that was about as well as we could have enjoyed ourselves...our mess had a skillet of eggnog Christmas morning.”<sup>466</sup>

1864 began with the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina and the rest of Cooke’s Brigade remaining in and around its camp near the Rapidan River. The men of the regiment continued their stints of picket duty and prepared to move into more permanent winter quarters. During the month of January, the various companies rotated their duty in such a way that soldiers spent only about one of every four to seven days on picket, allowing for plenty of down time in between. Writing to his brother on January 7, David Thompson stated, “We haven’t as much duty to do as we did a week or more ago, they have moved the picket lines to where it does not require such a strong picket; we have to go on about once every 7 days.”<sup>467</sup> With temperatures continuing to drop, the men of the brigade were finally able to begin the erection winter quarters during the first week of

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<sup>466</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Camp 27<sup>th</sup> NC, near Orange Court House, Virginia, to his sister, Yadkin County, North Carolina?, December 25, 1863, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina; David Thompson, Orange Court House, Virginia, to Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, January 1, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>467</sup> David Thompson, Orange Court House, Virginia, to John Thompson, location unknown, January 7, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 176.

January. A detail from each regiment was detached and sent to the location of the new winter camp, which lay about 3/12 miles southeast of Orange Court House, to begin the construction process. Private Samuel Lockhart, who had only recently returned to duty after recovering from his Bristoe Station wounds, was attached to this detail. On January 17 he wrote his sister, "I am at this time on detail about seven miles from our old camp, helping to build winter quarters. This is the twelfth day I have been at work. I have done more work on this detail than I have done since I have been in service." Continuing through the letter, Lockhart provided a good description of the cabins which the men of the regiment would soon call home: "I have got my cabin up and covered; it looks just like a little stable, but it will be very comfortable when I get it daubed and the door and my bunk fixed up, etc. It is fifteen feet long and eleven feet wide; only six will stay in it."<sup>468</sup>

While the construction details labored and the remainder of the regiment maintained its picket line in the face of an almost non-existent enemy presence, the officers and soldiers of the Twenty-Seventh were given ample opportunities for receiving furloughs home, if only for a short period of time. Lieutenant Graham described the current furlough system in a letter to his mother written in late January: "Furloughs are granted to the men now at the rate of 12 for every 100 men present, or about 1/8 of the number present, and one officer is allowed a furlough when there are three present with the Company." Under this arrangement, numerous officers and men were given a chance

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<sup>468</sup> Sloan, 76; Samuel P. Lockhart, near Orange Court House, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, January 17, 1864, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina;

to visit loved ones at home during the winter months of 1864. Major Joseph Webb, who had commanded the regiment ever since the wounding of Colonel Gilmer and Lieutenant Colonel Whitfield at Bristoe Station, was allowed a bout of sick leave during this time. While he was away, Captain Calvin Herring of Company D, himself only recently recovered from wounds, commanded the regiment. In terms of the brigade's leadership, Colonel Edward Hall, still filling in for the absent General Cooke, was apparently granted a furlough in early January. Colonel William MacRae of the Fifteenth North Carolina, reputedly a strict disciplinarian, was now temporarily in command of the brigade. Unknown to his officers and men, Brigadier General Cooke would not return to command until early April, although he would visit his troops several times during the winter.<sup>469</sup>

In addition to furloughs, the men of the regiment received at least some of their back pay during January, allowing them to send money home or purchase necessary articles and services from local citizens. Private Thompson wrote his mother on January 25, "I have lately drawn money, my monthly wages that was due us for last year. I drew \$58 and I have been on a little speculating expedition and have increased it to \$95, so I have as much as I have any need of at present...I paid \$10 for having my shoes half soled the other day." Whatever "speculating" Thompson did, the amounts of back pay were similar, if not more, for other soldiers. Samuel Lockhart, in a letter to his sister, commented, "I have some money to send home the first chance. I drew money this week.

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<sup>469</sup> Wagstaff, 177-78; David Thompson, Orange Court House, Virginia, to John Thompson, location unknown, January 7, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 16-26.

It was one hundred and twelve dollars. I will send one hundred the first chance; I have no use for it here.” The fact that these soldiers were not using their back pay to purchase additional food indicates that not only were their rations frequently sufficient, but also that few supplemental foodstuffs were locally available for a reasonable price given the effects of severe inflation and the continued presence of the two rival armies in the area.<sup>470</sup>

When it came to the rations issued to the army during this time, the quantity and quality fluctuated based on the amounts of food available as well as the condition of the transportation system. In an already quoted letter from the previous December, Private William Hunt had decried the poor size and quality of meat issued to the troops. Writing in early January, however, David Thompson had this to say about the daily ration: “We are fairing very well now in the way of something to eat, we are drawing coffee and sugar, pork and lard, flour, potatoes, meal and we haven’t fared so well since we left Fort Macon.” Discrepancies such as these were partly explained by Lieutenant James Graham in a letter written to his mother on February 1: “We did get short rations of meat for two or three weeks about the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, but are getting pretty good rations now. While the meat rations were so short we received extra rations of lard, coffee, sugar, molasses and dried fruit; so that we fared almost as well as we would have done with the meat.” In terms of clothing, there was little talk among the soldiers of any true shortages at this time, although several men asked for additional underclothes and gloves, etc. from home.

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<sup>470</sup> David Thompson, Orange Court House, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, January 25, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Samuel P. Lockhart, near Orange Court House, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, January 17, 1864, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

For example, Private Thompson asked his mother for a shirt in early January while at about the same time, Lieutenant Graham requested that the Hillsboro Soldier's Aid Society make fifty pairs of gloves for his company. Apparently, the English manufactured uniforms issued in October, combined with continued issues of North Carolina produced jackets, trousers, and shoes, kept the men fairly well clothed and shod, although their may have been exceptions to the rule. With the prospect of moving into winter quarters soon, a better chance for receiving furloughs, the payment of back wages, and usually sufficient rations and clothing issues, it is little surprising that the regiment's morale remained relatively high despite the inactivity of camp and the persistent cold weather. In summing up his opinion of the troops at this point in the war, Graham commented, "The whole army is in a good spirits and as good condition as I ever saw them."<sup>471</sup>

In addition to increased morale within the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, the size of the regiment itself was rapidly returning to its pre-Bristoe Station level. Having numbered fewer than 200 men in the immediate aftermath of the battle, the regiment rebounded to a strength of over 300 by mid January. This increase was due to many factors including the return of numerous slightly wounded officers and men, the forwarding of small numbers of new recruits and conscripts from all over North Carolina, and the continued good health of those in the ranks despite the rough camp and harsh weather conditions. Private Thompson described the noted increase in strength early in

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<sup>471</sup> David Thompson, Orange Court House, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson and John Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina and location unknown, January 5 and 7, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 176-78.

the month: "The Regt. numbers about 300 men [and] there are a great many coming in now." The return of wounded and sick was most evident at the company level.

Company G contained only one officer, First Lieutenant Graham, and fewer than twenty men after Bristoe Station. By late January however, Captain Stephen Dickson had returned to duty and, according to Private Lockhart, "Our Company is in tolerable good health at this time [and] we have about forty men for duty [including three officers]."

With the prospect for serious action during the winter months becoming lower with each passing day and the regiment set to move into warmer winter quarters soon, its strength would only continue to grow as the beginning of the upcoming spring campaign loomed. Sometime in late January, Lieutenant Colonel George Whitfield returned to command of the Twenty-Seventh after recovering from his Bristoe Station wound. As mentioned earlier, Colonel John Gilmer was not destined to return to the regiment. His wounds forced his transfer to the Invalid Corps in early January 1865 after more than a year of recovery at home. Despite Gilmer's continued absence, no further promotions or elections occurred within the regiment's high command until his official retirement in January of 1865. Even then the men would continue to be led by a lieutenant colonel or lesser ranking officer for the remainder of the war, as will be seen in later chapters.<sup>472</sup>

Another indication of the regiment's high morale and strong discipline was the continued lack of desertion within the Twenty-Seventh. As previously mentioned, although several dozen soldiers had deserted the ranks during the preceding three years,

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<sup>472</sup> David Thompson, Orange Court House, Virginia, to John Thompson, location unknown, January 7, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Samuel P. Lockhart, Orange Court House, Virginia, to Martha Jane Breeze, Orange County, North Carolina, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Jordan and Manarin, 7-98; Wagstaff, 176-78.

the rate of desertion was far less than that suffered by numerous other regiments. In addition, many of the early deserters had ultimately returned to duty within a few months. Unfortunately, the lack of desertion from the unit did not correspond to the other regiments in the brigade. As the war entered its fourth year, many soldiers and their families had simply had enough of the hardships, including conscription, government impressment of food and other supplies, and severe inflation, which had been generated by the conflict. Desertion was the most popular outlet for many husbands and fathers to return home and support their desperate families. This destructive trend quickly moved into the ranks of Cooke's Brigade. During January alone at least four deserters from the Forty-Sixth and Forty-Eighth North Carolina were apprehended and executed for the crime as an example to those contemplating leaving the ranks. Following the customs of military discipline, the entire brigade, minus those troops needed on picket duty, was present for the executions. Several officers and men from the regiment commented on the occurrence. In a letter to his mother written on January 25, Private Thompson wrote, "There is to be a deserter shot today between the hours of 10 and 12 o'clock but it is the orders for all that can walk to go and witness the affair...I don't care anything about seeing it...the fellow belongs to the 48<sup>th</sup> NC. I understand that there will be two men shot next Saturday belonging to the 46<sup>th</sup>. Our Regt. didn't have any one court martialed for desertion." Lieutenant Graham, obviously pleased with the lack of desertion from the regiment, commented on the affair: "One of the men in the 48<sup>th</sup> Regt., in our Brigade, is to be shot to-morrow for desertion and 4 more in the Brigade in a few days. The whole

Brigade will be called out to witness it...I am glad that there are none from our Regt. Our Company has never had a single deserter yet and I hope we never may.”<sup>473</sup>

On February 3, the long awaited movement into winter quarters finally commenced. Lieutenant Kenneth Jones of Company I marked the notable occasion in his diary: “Kirkland’s Brig arrived at ten o’clock and relieved us of our picket duty. We struck tents formed line and left at 11 o’clock for our new camp which was about six miles from there, we arrived about 2 o’clock, and commenced preparations for the winter.” During the preceding month, the work details from the brigade had been busy constructing the regiment’s winter huts. They had apparently finished most of the work by the first of February as the men quickly moved in and finally got out of the cold and wet weather. This was the first time since the Twenty-Seventh had left New Bern in early 1862 that anyone in the regiment had been in winter quarters. For the three companies that had garrisoned Fort Macon during the first year of the war, this was their first introduction to life in hastily constructed log huts. Captain Sloan, who had been stationed at Fort Macon during that first winter of the war, described the new camp as “a city of log cabins.” With only a few brief disturbances and occasional drill or picket duty, the men of the regiment were destined to remain in this fairly snug environment for the remainder of the winter.<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 16-17; David Thompson, Orange Court House, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, January 25, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 177; Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

<sup>474</sup> Sloan, 77; Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 17-18.

As the spring of 1864 approached, the Confederate government realized that most of its troops' terms of service were soon going to expire. As with most volunteer regiments, the men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina had initially enlisted for one year terms, but the Conscription Act of April 1862 had forced them to serve for three years or the duration of the war, whichever came first. Now, with enlistment terms set to expire shortly and no clear end to the conflict in sight, the Confederate Congress would be forced to take action in order to preserve its army and continue the struggle for Southern independence. To many in the ranks, the belief in maintaining the war effort apparently overshadowed their desire to go home at the end of their enlistments. In a letter to his mother written in early January, Private Thompson conveyed his understanding that he would probably not be allowed to leave the army in June: "You said you were looking forward for the time come when our three years service would be out but you was afraid they would not let us out. I don't expect to get out then. I don't see what else they can do [other] than to retain us, the three year men, they cant do without us, that was what saved them before." Lieutenant Graham also understood the immediate need for the army to remain in the field. In addition, he believed that rather than waiting to be forced to stay in service, the men should volunteer for the rest of the war, as some regiments were then doing. "Some of the troops are re-enlisting for the war. Johnston's N.C. Brigade has re-enlisted and I wish ours would do likewise, for it will be a great deal better to go in voluntarily before we are kept in by law, or, at least, it

will sound a great deal better. I feel certain that we will all be kept in the for the war and I think it exactly right.”<sup>475</sup>

Throughout early 1864, numerous regiments did reenlist for the remainder of the conflict. On February 5, under the guise of a routine dress parade, Lieutenant Colonel Whitfield encouraged the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh to reenlist voluntarily before they were kept in by force. Lieutenant Jones of Company I recalled the occasion in his diary:

At the hour for dress parade the Regt was formed and Coln Whitfield instead of having the usual parade called upon the Regt to extend their term of service for the war. The colors was called to the front about ten paces, he then asked who would dress upon them. The majority of the Regt dressed up promptly, and I am proud to say I company reenlisted to a man with the exception of one Ed Messer who reenlisted the next day.

With this action, the regiment voluntarily agreed to continue fighting until the war ended, either in victory or defeat. As in 1862, most of the regiment’s officers and enlisted men, many of whose homes remained in close proximity to or even behind enemy lines in eastern North Carolina, understood the need for the continuance of their service. Those who refused to reenlist were soon forced to do so by the Confederate government, but most of the troops apparently saw the light, so to speak, and went ahead voluntarily. Word of this action, which was likewise taken by the Fifteenth North Carolina, reached the chambers of the Confederate Congress, where in mid February, the House and Senate

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<sup>475</sup> David Thompson, Orange Court House, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, January 5, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 178-79.

passed a “Joint resolution of thanks to the Fifteenth and Twenty-seventh regiments of North Carolina troops, for their noble and patriotic conduct in re-enlisting for the war.”<sup>476</sup>

The first week of February saw a minor engagement several miles downriver from Rapidan Station at a crossing known as Morton’s Ford. On February 6, one Union division managed to get across the river and drive off the Confederate pickets in the area. The next day, however, elements of Ewell’s Second Corps arrived and repulsed the Federal attack, driving the enemy back across the river. The brief offensive had been organized as a diversion for Union Major General Benjamin Butler’s attempt to attack Richmond via the Peninsula, hopefully freeing the thousands of prisoners of war located there in the process. When Butler’s offensive bogged down along the Chickahominy River without achieving anything, the Army of the Potomac’s part in the operation was called off as well. Cooke’s Brigade played a very limited role in this action. On the morning of the seventh, the brigade, including the Twenty-Seventh, rushed north to relieve other Confederate troops on the picket line along the Rapidan, thus freeing up additional regiments of the Second Corps to confront the enemy attack at Morton’s Ford. Lieutenant Jones described the regiment’s movements for February 7 as follows:

“Formed line of march an hour before day and arrived about a mile to the right of the Rapid Ann Station about ten o’clock (a distance of about 10 miles [from camp]) relieved a picket, then awaited the advance of the enemy. Some firing along a part of the line but quiet at this point. Very cold night.” The next day, the troops backtracked to their winter

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<sup>476</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 18; Frank E. Vandiver, ed., *Southern Historical Society Papers, New Series—Number XII, Whole Number L: Proceedings of the First Confederate Congress, Fourth Session, December 7, 1863-February 18, 1864*, (Richmond, VA: The Virginia Historical Society, 1953), 424-35; McPherson, 718-19.

camp and found General Cooke there to visit them. Despite not yet being well enough to take command, the general talked to his officers and men and offered words of encouragement. He was especially glad to hear that the Twenty-Seventh, his former regiment, had voluntarily re-enlisted for the remainder of the war. Jones recalled: “[Cooke] expressed his delight at hearing the majority of the Regt were determined not to be behind all the other Regts. from N.C. but with the head where she always is in time of danger and that we were determined to fight to the last, and if necessary to die for our liberties, our rights.”<sup>477</sup>

During the rest of February, the regiment continued its winter recovery, the men occasionally stirring from their quarters for inspection as well as company or battalion drill. The slightly warmer weather that arrived early in the month caused much of the recently fallen snow and ice to melt, turning the entire camp into a sea of mud. Writing home at this time, Lieutenant Graham commented, “We have the same old mud as usual. The whole country around here is very much like Orange Co No. Ca. especially the red mud.” Largely confined to his quarters for much of the time, Major Joseph Webb longed for some sort of activity. Writing to his cousin, he stated: “I did think that when I became comfortably housed in my winter quarters, I would enjoy the quiet and repose of such a life, but alas! I find it too tame and monotonous for my temperament...I have nothing to

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<sup>477</sup> Kennedy, 260; Gordon C. Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness: May 5-6, 1864*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 1-7; Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, 19-20.

do, nothing to read. I have to resort to the constant application of the soothing, and consoling effects of my pipe and tobacco.”<sup>478</sup>

As during the previous summer, a religious revival swept through the brigade, and indeed through the entire Army of Northern Virginia, during the long winter months in camp. In addition to outdoor meetings and the use of any local churches, the soldiers of Cooke’s Brigade began work on a log chapel on February 17. Despite work delays caused by the intensely cold and wet weather, the church was apparently completed by the end of the month. Writing to his mother on March 4, James Graham commented, “I heard a special sermon this morning from Rev. Mr. Smith of Greensboro who is now acting temporarily as Chaplain of our Regt. We have preaching also every night. Our Brigade has constructed a very neat and very comfortable log house as a Chapel and we have preaching in it almost every day.” The regiment had gone through most of the war without an official chaplain, although local or visiting preachers often provided services for the troops, especially when remaining in one place for a while. The visit from Reverend Smith was just another example of this.<sup>479</sup> The revival not only allowed the soldiers a chance for diversion from the dull routine of camp, but genuinely affected some within the ranks. Private Samuel Lockhart described his reaction to the meetings in a letter to his sister: “We are having a very nice little meeting going on a this time; there are four made a profession last night; they seemed very cool. There is not much

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<sup>478</sup> Wagstaff, 179; Hickerson, 72-73.

<sup>479</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 20-21; Wagstaff, 182; David S. Fairley of Cumberland County is listed as having served as Regimental Chaplain from February 10, 1863 to December 8, 1863 before resigning for unknown reasons; he was the only official Chaplain ever assigned to the regiment.

excitement but surely the Lord is with us. I have been troubled and dissatisfied ever since last fall, but since this meeting commenced I feel greatly relieved.” With many soldiers coming from religious family backgrounds, and with another year of deadly conflict about to begin, many throughout the army, not knowing whether or not they would survive the coming spring campaign, felt compelled to participate in such meetings.<sup>480</sup>

The first week of March saw Federal forces along the Rapidan once again in motion to the south. It began on February 28 when Union Major General Judson Kilpatrick’s cavalry division skirted Confederate lines and headed south along the Virginia Central Railroad towards Richmond, tearing up track along the way. Included in this raiding force was a small advance party under the command of Colonel Ulric Dahlgren. Dahlgren’s force was to enter Richmond quickly and free the thousands of Union prisoners of war confined at Belle Isle. Once successful, both parties were to escape to the east and join Butler’s forces on the Peninsula. In conjunction with the Kilpatrick/Dahlgren Raid, two corps of the Army of the Potomac were ordered to create a diversion by moving in the direction of Madison Court House. During the night of February 28, in response to Federal activity across the river, the men of Cooke’s Brigade, temporarily commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Whitfield of the Twenty-Seventh, in conjunction with other elements of A.P. Hill’s Corps, were ordered to “cook up rations and be ready to move at a moments warning.”<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>480</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Orange Court House, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, March 14, 1864, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Hess, 204-205.

<sup>481</sup> Kennedy, 260; Sloan, 79; Wagstaff, 179-80.

The orders to march came very early in the morning on March 1. Lieutenant Graham remembered: "About 3 o'clock Tuesday morning [March 1] we left camp and started for Liberty Mills on the Rapid Ann River. It was sleeting very fast when we left camp and seemed to be but the beginning of a regular sleet and snow storm." After crossing the river, the troops continued toward Madison Court House, arriving early in the afternoon. Upon arrival outside the town, the Confederates discovered that the enemy had withdrawn back to their original positions. Pulling back towards the Rapidan, Cooke's Brigade "marched pretty rapidly back to the cross roads and were then stopped to wait for orders after putting one Regt. on picket." Graham continued, "we did not receive any further orders and remained at this place all night." That night, according to Captain John Sloan, "the weather turned very cold, and the next morning we retraced our steps through snow and ice to our camp, the men suffering greatly from fatigue and cold." In describing the sufferings of the troops during this brief foray as well as their continued resiliency, Lieutenant Graham wrote his mother, "It was terribly cold and you may be sure we slept very little that night...I saw men on that march bare footed without the least sign of a shoe and now and then you could see the blood in their tracks as they marched along. I don't see how they could possibly stand it, but they kept along pretty well."<sup>482</sup>

Once back in camp on March 2, the regiment was given little time for rest. During the afternoon of the third, "we received orders to report at Richmond as soon as possible." Boarding the cars of the Virginia Central Railroad, one officer remembered,

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<sup>482</sup> Wagstaff, 180; Sloan, 79-80; Clark, 445; Hess, 200.

“we took the train at 3 o’clock and started at full speed for Richmond, but when we reached Gordonsville we were ordered back to camp as Richmond was safe.” The reason for this countermanded emergency was the reported presence of Kilpatrick’s cavalry outside of the Confederate capital. Despite initial success at evading Southern troops, the Union raiders were ultimately unsuccessful in their mission. Kilpatrick was forced away from Richmond by March 2, while Dahlgren’s force was cut off by Confederate cavalry east of the city and forced to surrender, Dahlgren himself being killed. Found on his body were orders for his men to burn Richmond to the ground and assassinate Confederate President Jefferson Davis. The legitimacy of these orders has been counted as suspect ever since. General Meade and others in the Federal high command steadfastly denied their involvement and the controversy still burns bright among historians today. For the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh, however, the movements to counter Union operations were now over for the foreseeable future. Arriving back in camp late in the evening of March 3, the men were once again settled into their winter quarters.<sup>483</sup>

Up until mid March the furlough system mentioned earlier had remained in effect, allowing numerous soldiers to visit loved ones at home, some for the first time since their enlistment in 1861. With the worsening condition of the roads as well as the upcoming spring campaign to prepare for, however, the army required nearly all railroad cars and wagons to move rations, ammunition and other military necessities. James Graham, who had received a furlough about a month earlier, commented on the change, which was no

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<sup>483</sup> Kennedy, 260; Wagstaff, 181.

doubt a great disappointment to many in the army: “Furloughs in this army were stopped about a week ago as the Government needed all the transportation to bring up rations.”

Private Samuel Lockhart, in a letter to his sister, also recorded his feelings on the subject: “The furloughs have all been stopped. I was in hopes that I would get one before they were stopped, but it did not reach my case.”<sup>484</sup>

One of the more unusual, and certainly entertaining episodes, of the war occurred on March 23 in the form of a massive snowball fight that eventually engaged two entire Confederate infantry brigades. During the morning of the twenty-second, a massive winter storm descended upon central Virginia, dumping upwards of a foot of snow on the camps of the Army of Northern Virginia. By the morning of the twenty-third, the entire landscape was “shrowded in white.” What started as a playful fight within the ranks of the Twenty-Seventh soon expanded and eventually included all of Cooke and Kirkland’s North Carolina brigades, perhaps as many as 4,000 men. As Cooke was still absent from duty, Colonel MacRae of the Fifteenth North Carolina commanded the brigade on this occasion. Lieutenant Kenneth Jones offered perhaps the best description of the ensuing engagement in his diary entry for March 23:

[In the early morning hours] the right and left wings of the Regt. had a snow fight. About 8 o’clock A.M. the left got the best [of it]. We soon found that the 46<sup>th</sup> wished to try us, for their skirmishers were in our camp. We formed what men we could, threw our skirmishers out and before the engagement began we were informed that the skirmishers from Kirkland’s Brig were in the camp of the 46<sup>th</sup>. So we then formed the Regt as many as we could, marched off in double quick to assist the 46<sup>th</sup>, we soon became engaged, was not long before the Brigades were both

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<sup>484</sup> Wagstaff, 182; Samuel P. Lockhart, Orange Court House, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, March 14, 1864, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

engaged, after a severe struggle a cessation of hostilities was asked for till 3 o'clock. Was agreed to. We had driven them into their camp, captured a good many prisoners also several flags. At 3 the Brigg's were formed opposite each other in front of Gen Heths Hd. Qrs, agreement to fight 1 hour. Skirmishers were thrown out, some 16 contests began and after a hard contest the struggle ceased. Considered a drawn fight.

Despite the good natured fun of the event, which took on the form of a real battle, there were numerous injuries inflicted on both sides as a few soldiers were not content to throw snow alone, but added rocks to their arsenal. At one point, Colonel MacRae was surrounded by some of Kirkland's soldiers, pulled from his horse, and pronounced a prisoner, although he was not injured. All in all, however, the snowball fight provided welcome relief from the monotony of winter quarters and cemented the already strong relationship between the two brigades. In the upcoming spring campaign that close association would prove especially crucial. Two days after the fight, the reality of military life descended upon the men once again as a member of the Forty-Eighth North Carolina was executed for desertion in the presence of the entire brigade.<sup>485</sup>

The last week of March witnessed a visit to the army by North Carolina Governor Zebulon Baird Vance. A former colonel of the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina Regiment, Vance had been elected in 1862 and had since done all in his power to increase North Carolina's commitment to the Confederate cause, while at the same time trying to limit the extension of centralized power in Richmond. He was very popular among the troops from the state for his untiring energy in endeavoring to keep them well clothed and

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<sup>485</sup> Hess, 203-204; Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 22-24; David Thompson, Orange Court House, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, March 27, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

equipped. His visit to the Army of Northern Virginia included speeches to each North Carolina brigade. On March 30, Lieutenant Jones reported, the Governor “addressed the troops of Cooke’s and Kirkland’s Brigades in a very able and eloquent speech admired by all.” Present on the occasion, which apparently ran three hours in length, were numerous generals including division commander Henry Heth and cavalry commanders J.E.B. Stuart and William H.F. Lee. Several officers and men of the regiment thought well of the speech and mentioned its effects in letters home. Lieutenant Graham wrote his mother on April 2: “Everybody seemed to be perfectly delighted with the Governor and a large majority of soldiers will support him in the coming campaign...His campaign in the army will do a great deal of good as he endeavors to cheer the soldiers up and put them in good spirits.” One of Graham’s soldiers, Private David Thompson, also commented on the Governor’s visit: “Gov. Vance made a speech last week, it was a good thing, he was largely attended and I think settled the minds of a good many whose minds were not settled...he is largely attended by troops from other states [as well]...I think I could listen to him all day...I stood upon a stool so as to see over the heads of the crowd.”<sup>486</sup>

The Governor’s visit occasioned much discussion in the ranks about the future of the war and North Carolina’s role in it. Elections for governor were scheduled in North Carolina for the fall. Opposing Vance for re-election was none other than the peace candidate William Holden, who, as mentioned in chapter seven, was calling for North Carolina to return to the Union and even turn against the Confederacy. Many soldiers

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<sup>486</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 24-25; Wagstaff, 184; David Thompson, Orange Court House, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, April 5, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Hess, 205-206; Barrett, 182-83, 242.

viewed a vote for Holden as submission to Federal and abolitionist coercion, repudiation of the Southern cause, and an affront to those in the army who had sacrificed everything for that cause during the previous three years of war. In commenting on the subject, Assistant Surgeon Leander Hunt wrote, "I think [Vance] will get the greater number of the army vote...I can only speak for our Regiment...I don't think he will get all of the votes cast in the Regiment, some few would vote for Holden if they were at home. If any have to get killed I hope it will be them between this and the election."

In terms of the war effort itself, most believed that the upcoming campaigning season would most likely end the war one way or the other, although defeat was not seen as much of a possibility to many in the ranks. In the same letter just quoted, Hunt commented, "It is thought by some wise men that the next six months will decide the destiny of our Confederacy. I think so if we are successful, but if our arms should meet with adversity six months will no sooner end the war than I will fly in that time." With the spring campaign approaching, and a return to active operations likely in a few weeks, Lieutenant Graham wrote in much the same tone in a letter to his mother on April 8: "It will not be long before the campaign will open and active operations commence for the winds and sun will soon dry up the roads. I feel confident that our arms will be successful in this summer's campaign and hope that it may convince the Yankees that it is useless contending any longer." Girding himself for the upcoming struggle, Major Joseph Webb stated, "When he [the enemy] does venture across [the Rapidan], he will repent it, and I feel confident that our nation will be gladdened by one of the most glorious and decisive victories of the war." Through all the confidence and bombast

exhibited by the men, there was a solid trust in the judgment of the army's commander, Robert E. Lee. Writing to his sister in mid March, Private Lockhart commented, "I believe it is the general opinion that Gen. Lee will go to Pennsylvania again this campaign. I don't think I will like to go much, but Lee has got a long head and knows what is best to do. I am willing to follow him where ever he leads."<sup>487</sup>

In Washington, and on the north side of the Rapidan River, meanwhile, Federal planners were preparing to give Lee's army and the Confederacy itself the fight of its life. For three years, the Union war effort had failed to defeat the Confederacy. In the past too many Federal offensives had been launched against the South with seemingly little or no coordination. Despite the victory at Gettysburg and the capture of Vicksburg and Chattanooga, 1863 had been allowed to sputter out without a war-ending offensive. In March of 1864, President Abraham Lincoln promoted Ulysses S. Grant to the rank of Lieutenant General, gave him command of the entire United States Army, and charged him with ending the war as soon as possible. With Lincoln due for re-election in November, Federal forces would have to win major victories, if not the war, before that time. In a sense, the election had become a referendum on a very unpopular war. Confederate political and military leaders, including Lee, were only too aware of this fact. They hoped to stall the Union offensives until Lincoln was defeated by the Democrats, thereby possibly ending the war with Southern independence.

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<sup>487</sup> Leander Gwynn Hunt, Orange Court House, Virginia, to Miss M.A. Conrad, Yadkin County, North Carolina, April 1, 1864, Bryan Grimes Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina; Wagstaff, 186; Hess, 205-206; Barrett, 242; Samuel P. Lockhart, Orange Court House, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, March 14, 1864, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Hickerson, 76.

Up until this time, Grant had served with distinction in the Western Theater, gaining notoriety for his hard fighting at Shiloh and the capture of the Confederate citadel of Vicksburg. Now, in the spring of 1864, Grant planned to push all of his forces forward against the Confederacy in unison. In the West, Union General William T. Sherman would take command of a majority of Federal forces in that theater and move to capture Atlanta, Georgia, one of the Confederacy's chief manufacturing and railroad centers. The most important element in the plan was the utilization of all available Federal troops in Virginia. Grant planned for Major General George Meade and the Army of the Potomac, which numbered nearly 120,000 men, to push across the Rapidan in early May and engage Lee's army, hopefully crushing him quickly. Meanwhile, other Federal forces under Benjamin Butler and Franz Sigel would advance simultaneously towards Richmond from the Peninsula and into the vitally important Shenandoah Valley. By hitting the Confederates in Virginia everywhere at once, Grant hoped that Lee's vaunted army would be destroyed in detail, thereby opening Richmond for capture and realizing a quick end to the war.<sup>488</sup>

While Federal forces across the South prepared to move forward in early May, the Army of Northern Virginia, including the men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, readied themselves for a return to active campaigning. Despite remaining in winter quarters, events moved fairly quickly during mid to late April. On April 10, Brigadier General Cooke, fully recovered from his Bristoe Station wound, returned to command of the brigade. That same day, Lieutenant Jones jotted in his diary that the men had

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<sup>488</sup> McPherson, 718-22; Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness*, 29-49.

received “orders to cut off baggage to 30 lbs also to keep 7 days rations on hand prepared for marching.” In lightening their loads, many officers and soldiers began sending home extra clothes, blankets and other items that would not be necessary in the coming months. Writing to his mother in mid April, James Graham wrote, “I think our transportation will be cut down this summer and will therefore send my uniform coat and blue pants home by the first opportunity for I don’t want any uniform coat for summer wear...I [also] sent a pair of boots home in a box.”<sup>489</sup>

Given the continued return of sick and wounded soldiers to the ranks as well as the addition of more than two dozen recruits and conscripts during the early months of 1864, the strength of the regiment, which numbered around 300 in January, increased to well over 400 officers and men by the end of April. In a letter to his Aunt written early in the month, Major Webb stated: “Our glorious old Regt begins to assume its former proportions, nearly all the wounded have returned and we can now carry into battle about 400 men.” In terms of the regiment’s field and line officers, the months after the bloodbath at Bristoe Station had seen many changes. With Colonel John Gilmer absent wounded, Lieutenant Colonel Whitfield and Major Webb commanded the regiment. At the company level, meanwhile, promotions from the junior officers and the ranks had once again effected a stable command situation. Company A was now led by Captain John D. Bryan, brother of the unit’s former commander, the deceased Captain James Bryan. Captain John A. Sloan continued to lead Company B while Captain Edward G. Wooten commanded Company C. Following his temporary stint in command of the

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<sup>489</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 26; Wagstaff, 186-87.

regiment, Captain Calvin Herring remained in command of Company D while Company E was still led by Captain Robert W. Joyner. With the mortal wounding of Captain Thomas Jones of Company F at Bristoe Station, First Lieutenant Benjamin S. Skinner was promoted to command of the company in November. Following a lengthy convalescence, Captain Stephen Dickson was once again in command of Company G while Captain James F. Manker, who had replaced the deceased Captain Joseph Williams, now led Company H. Captain William R. Larkins remained in command of Company I while Company K continued to be led by Captain Hopton H. Coor, who had commanded the "Saulston Volunteers" since July of 1862. Numerous additional promotions and elections replaced any vacant positions among the junior officers and non-commissioned officers in each company. In terms of the brigade as a whole, similar reorganizations took place within each regiment during the winter months. First Lieutenant Graham reckoned that by the beginning of May Cooke's Brigade numbered between 1,800 and 2,000 officers and men fit for duty. Overall, Lee would have roughly 65,000 men for the spring campaign, about half of Meade's strength, although being outnumbered had become a common denominator for the Army of Northern Virginia by this stage in the war.<sup>490</sup>

As the month of April came to an end, the troops waited for the roads to dry and the campaign to commence. By May 1, the men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina had vacated their winter quarters, sent their excess baggage and tents to the rear, and

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<sup>490</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 8-98; James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina perhaps in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Rhea, 34; Hickerson, 75.

taken up positions near the Orange Plank Road. This provided the brigade with a good advanced position from which they could easily move to the east toward the crossing points of the Rapidan River, from which direction it was believed the Federals would soon approach. Unknown to the men in the ranks, the two armies were soon destined to collide in a rough patch of heavily wooded Virginia countryside known locally as the Wilderness. In the upcoming battle in this unforgiving terrain, Cooke's Brigade would play a leading role in not only holding its ground against repeated Federal attacks but also in preserving a large part of the Army of Northern Virginia itself from complete destruction.<sup>491</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 26; David Thompson, Orange Court House, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, April 5, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

## Chapter 10—May, 1864

**“As I cannot mention all I conclude by stating that all did their duty nobly.”**

**- Brigadier General John Rogers Cooke<sup>492</sup>**

On May 4, 1864, the Army of the Potomac, still commanded by General George Meade but accompanied by Union General in Chief Ulysses S. Grant, began its long awaited offensive to crush Lee’s army and capture Richmond. Throughout the day, Federal forces, divided into two separate columns, marched south from their camps near Brandy Station and crossed the Rapidan River at Germanna and Ely’s fords. The initial Union plan was to move through the unforgiving terrain of the Wilderness as quickly as possible and engage the Confederates on the other side. As the campaign began however, Federal planners realized that in order to protect the army’s massive wagon train from Confederate cavalry raids, the entire force would have to stop in the Wilderness overnight before pushing on to the south and west on May 5. This change in plans did not cause the Union high command too much anxiety. They believed that Robert E. Lee would likely move his army up to its former defensive positions along Mine Run and await the Federal attack, thereby giving the army an opportunity to clear the Wilderness before coming to grips with the enemy. Unfortunately for the Army of the Potomac, Lee had learned of the enemy’s position and planned to trap the Federals in the rugged woodland, thereby neutralizing much of their numerical superiority, especially in artillery. On May 4, while Union troops crossed the river and went into bivouac, the Army of Northern Virginia

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<sup>492</sup> Janet B. Hewett, ed., *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Part I: Reports, Volume VI*, (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1996), 705.

stirred from its camps near Orange Court House and marched east, intent on stopping Grant's offensive.<sup>493</sup>

For the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, the spring campaign, known ever afterwards as the "Overland Campaign," began at noon on the fourth. At that hour the troops assembled on the Orange Plank Road and were quickly on their way to the east. It was Lee's plan for A.P. Hill's Third Corps to move via the Plank Road while Richard Ewell's Second Corps utilized the Orange Turnpike, which ran parallel a few miles to the north. The First Corps, James Longstreet's troops, only recently returned to Virginia from Tennessee, would follow along roads to the south. Lee hoped to trap the Federals in the Wilderness with Ewell and Hill while Longstreet maneuvered to the south in an attempt to find the enemy's flank. During the day, the men of Henry Heth's Division, leading Hill's Corps, traveled about fifteen miles before camping for the night near Mine Run and the small village of New Verdiersville. Lieutenant Kenneth Jones of Company I recalled the day's events in his diary: "Recd orders at ten o'clock to cook 3 days rations at 12 formed line and marched in the direction of Fredericksburg on Plank road. Marched 15 miles [and] camped...threw the sharp shooters to the front of [the] picket."<sup>494</sup>

On the morning of May 5, as the Federals slowly prepared to leave the Wilderness, Hill and Ewell's troops continued their movement to the east. By 6:00 a.m. Ewell's lead division reached a clearing known as Saunders' Field and began entrenching within sight of the advanced elements of the Union Fifth Corps, causing severe

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<sup>493</sup> Rhea, 55-93.

<sup>494</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 26-7; Wagstaff, 190; Sloan, 81; Rhea, 78-90.

consternation at Meade's headquarters. Hill's objective for the day was to reach the vital Plank-Brock Road intersection. If the Confederates could seize the crossroads they would effectively split the Union army in two, as this was one of the few roadways that connected the Union Second Corps south of Chancellorsville with the Fifth and Sixth Corps in and around Wilderness Tavern and Saunders' Field. With Heth's Division still leading the corps, and Kirkland's Brigade at the head of the division, the troops soon encountered light resistance in the form of a regiment of Union cavalry, the Fifth New York to be exact, which had been ordered to scout the roadway in preparation for the day's movement. Throughout the morning hours, Kirkland's men pushed the enemy back in a brisk skirmish and edged ever closer to the intersection. In describing the rolling engagement, First Lieutenant James Graham of Company G commented, "about 7 o'clock we came upon the Yankees and Kirkland's Brigade was thrown into line of battle across the plank road, skirmishers thrown forward, and soon we commenced driving the enemy. Kirkland's Brigade drove them till 11 o'clock (about 6 miles). Our Brigade was then thrown to the front and relieved Kirkland."<sup>495</sup>

While Cooke's Brigade and the men of the Twenty-Seventh continued to push the New Yorkers back along the Orange Plank Road, Generals Grant and Meade worked to reorient the dispersed Army of the Potomac towards Lee's forces, which seemed to be materializing out of nowhere. As Gouverneur Warren's Fifth Corps squared off with Ewell across Saunders' Field, the Union commanders realized the importance of the Plank-Brock Road intersection and quickly ordered the nearest troops at hand, Brigadier

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<sup>495</sup> Rhea, 94-127; Wagstaff, 190; Sloan, 81; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 703; Hess, 208-9.

General George Getty's Division of John Sedgwick's Sixth Corps, to hurry south and secure the crossroads before the Confederates captured it. Meanwhile, Major General Winfield Hancock's Second Corps, Meade's largest combat unit, was also sent scurrying up the Brock Road from the southeast towards the developing battle.<sup>496</sup>

Moving forward in line of battle on both sides of the Plank Road and preceded by a dense cloud of skirmishers and sharpshooters, Cooke's Brigade edged ever closer to the Brock Road. Between 12 and 1 o'clock, Cooke's troops finally cleared the Federal cavalry from their front and rushed forward only to be met by the lead elements of Getty's Division. The Confederates had lost the race for the crossroads by only a few vital minutes. Lieutenant Jones recalled the incident, "the sharpshooters were advanced till finally they came on their line of battle which fired several volies into us...after some resistance we fell back a short distance and awaited their advance." With his skirmishers repulsed by a Federal battle line of unknown strength and under orders from Lee not to bring on a general engagement with his lone division, Heth quickly ordered his troops to halt and form on both sides of the Plank Road. In his official report on the battle, the division commander commented, "Cooke's Brigade continued to drive the enemy, until it reached a point where the Brock Road crossed the Plank Road. From the resistance made by the enemy at this point, it was evident that he was in considerable force."<sup>497</sup>

Initially, Heth's line consisted only of Cooke's Brigade, which deployed with two regiments on each side of the roadway. The men of the Twenty-Seventh took position

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<sup>496</sup> Rhea, 129-35.

<sup>497</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 27; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 703; Rhea, 127-36, 194-95; Wagstaff, 190.

immediately to the left of the road while the Forty-Eighth North Carolina rested on their left. The Forty-Sixth and Fifteenth, in that order, continued the line on the right side of the road to the south. Within an hour, during which time the regiment's skirmishers were kept busy sniping at the enemy, Davis' Brigade of Mississippi and North Carolina troops "(Colonel Stone commanding) was ordered to form on Cooke's left; the brigades of Walker and Kirkland were held in reserve." The terrain that confronted the brigade was anything but welcoming. Lieutenant Graham described the regiment's position as the "thickest forest of little trees that I ever saw," while Captain John Sloan of Company B referred to the Wilderness as "an almost impenetrable thicket of undergrowth." In referring to the limited visibility encountered by his division, Heth stated, "The dense wood, on our right, left, and in our front, obstructed all view." Before the day was over the soldiers of both armies would become well acquainted with this dismal and confusing ground.<sup>498</sup>

Beginning around 3 o'clock, the Union forces arrayed along Brock Road, having secured the vital crossroads, launched numerous attacks against Heth's line in an attempt to push back and destroy the lone Confederate division on the Plank Road before it could be reinforced. As Heth arrayed his battle line, Major General Camdus Wilcox, also of the Third Corps, positioned his division near the Chewing Farm, several miles to the rear, in order to form a loose connection between Hill and Ewell's fronts. Meanwhile, Major General Richard Anderson's Division and the whole of Longstreet's Corps were not

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<sup>498</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 703; Sloan, 81; Wagstaff, 190; Clark, 446; Rhea, 192-95; John Michael Priest, *Nowhere to Run: The Wilderness, May 4-5, 1864*, (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Co., 1995), 144.

scheduled to arrive on the field until early the next morning. The Army of Northern Virginia found itself in a dangerous situation. Divided in two by the impenetrable thicket of the Wilderness, Lee's army face defeat in detail unless the scattered Confederate forces could hold their own against Grant's superior numbers.<sup>499</sup>

The first Union assaults of the afternoon along Plank Road were made by elements of Getty's Division, which included troops from Vermont, New York, and Pennsylvania. Cooke and Stone's defenders utilized whatever protection they could find in the dense woodland. A series of low ridges extending north to south provided slight cover, as did the numerous small trees and underbrush that predominated in the area. In contrast, the Federals advanced only to have their formations broken apart by the difficult terrain. The resulting battle was more a series of disjointed advances and firefights rather than the grand attack envisioned by Union generals. With limited visibility and little sense of direction, the two sides hammered away at each other at close range with devastating results. Lieutenant Kenneth Jones described the beginning of the fighting: "They advanced about 3 o'clock when we drew in and one of the severest engagements of the war ensued." After an intense firefight during which the Federals got the worst of it, Getty's troops pulled back towards the Brock Road, leaving the Confederate line intact. In his report on the battle, Heth wrote, "About 3 o'clock p.m. the enemy made a vigorous attack on Cooke and Stone but were repulsed."<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>499</sup> Rhea, 192-95.

<sup>500</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 703; Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 27-28; Rhea, 192-204; Hess, 208-10; Sloan, 81-82.

Following this initial Union assault, Heth reinforced his line with Brigadier General Henry Walker's Virginia and Tennessee Brigade, which took up position on Cooke's right flank, continuing the line to the south. Kirkland's Brigade remained in reserve on the Plank Road, in position to send support to any part of the line under attack. On Brock Road meanwhile, Hancock's Second Corps began arriving, eventually boosting Union strength on this part of the battlefield to nearly 30,000 men. In contrast Heth's entire division mustered barely 6,500 troops. Between 4:00 and 4:30, Hancock and Getty launched another attack, this time incorporating elements of five Union divisions. In describing this new attack, Lieutenant Graham stated, "About four o'clock the enemy advanced upon us three lines deep and soon we were at it hot and heavy. Though greatly outnumbered, our Brigade stuck to them." For the remainder of the afternoon and evening attack after attack rocked the regiment's position, resulting in heavy casualties to both sides and necessitating a great expenditure of ammunition. Not since the battle of Fredericksburg, nearly a year and half earlier, had the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina been involved in such a sustained and determined defensive action. In describing the carnage, General Heth commented, "The men had no protection other than that afforded by the growth of timber in their front, which, of course, afforded the enemy equal protection. In this position the division repulsed ten successive and determined attacks of the enemy...the distance separating the contending forces was ascertained subsequently, by measurement, to be ninety yards."<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>501</sup> Wagstaff, 190-91; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 704; Rhea, 192-232; Clark, 446.

Despite an impressive edge in numbers, the Federal attackers, whose formations were repeatedly broken up by the terrain and the intense volume of fire coming from the Confederate defenders, were unable to fracture Heth's line. Through it all, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh, as well as their sister regiments in Cooke's Brigade, maintained their position, kept up an impressive rate of fire, and showed incredible discipline and determination in repulsing each Union attack in turn. As a result of the troops' sustained musketry fire, the ground in front of the regiment was quickly covered with dead and wounded Federals. As gaps appeared in the Confederate lines, individual regiments from Kirkland's Brigade were ordered forward to stabilize the situation. Around 6:30, while his troops fought the enemy to a stalemate, Heth stated in his report: "The battle had now raged with unremitting fury for two hours and a half... The enemy's dead marked his line of battle so well and were in such numbers that, if living, they would have formed a most formidable line. This was especially the case in Cooke's and Davis' fronts."<sup>502</sup>

About this time, Confederate reinforcements arrived in the form of Wilcox's Division, which had been ordered to the front in response to the continued Union buildup in front of Heth. These fresh troops immediately formed on Heth's right and launched a savage counterattack against Francis Barlow's Division of Hancock's Corps, which was even then working its way around the Confederate right flank. Heth happily reported the arrival of these needed reinforcements: "Wilcox attacked by brigades as they came up,

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<sup>502</sup> James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina perhaps in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 704; Rhea, 192-232; Hess, 211.

each moving to the point most threatened on their arrival...at this time, and in fact before Wilcox arrived, most of my brigades had fired their last round of ammunition. They nevertheless had not yielded up an inch of ground.” Following another hour of vicious combat, the addition of Wilcox’s troops, the exhausted condition of the combatants, and the rapid approach of darkness finally brought an end to the fighting. The Confederate defenses had held, due in no small part to the resilient stand of Cooke’s Brigade.

Hancock’s thousands had failed to breach Hill’s thin line on the Plank Road, while, to the north, Ewell’s Corps had likewise held its ground along the Orange Turnpike against several disjointed Union attacks launched throughout the long afternoon. In his report to Richmond, written that night, General Lee stated: “The enemy concentrated upon Genl Hill, who, with Heth’s and Wilcox’s Divisions, successfully resisted repeated and desperate assaults.” In describing the performance of his division, Heth glowingly commented, “the heroism displayed by my division on this day will form a bright page in our country’s history,” while Brigadier General Cooke stated, in reference to the bravery of his officers and men, “As I cannot mention all I conclude by stating that all did their duty nobly.” As the sounds of musketry sputtered out across the battlefield, darkness and dense clouds of smoke covered the shattered landscape of the Wilderness.<sup>503</sup>

Despite holding their own against heavy odds, the divisions of Heth and Wilcox were left in dire straits by the end of the day. Continuous combat and a constant shuffling of troops to endangered spots had all but destroyed the cohesion of the Confederate line across the Orange Plank Road. Instead of a straight battle line, Hill’s

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<sup>503</sup> Rhea, 232-53; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 704-05; Sloan, 82; Hess, 212-13; Dowdey, 722.

two divisions had been reduced to a jumbled mass of regiments facing in every conceivable direction, a formation hardly able to withstand another determined assault. In addition, the defenders had suffered heavy casualties as a result of the intense volume of Union firepower unleashed against their ranks. Cooke's Brigade alone was reported to have lost close to 900 men, almost half of its original strength. The situation facing the Confederates along the Plank Road was made worse by the fact that Lee refused to allow Heth and Wilcox to reorganize their divisions into a compact defensible line, something the Army of Northern Virginia would regret come morning. The reasoning behind Lee's refusal concerned orders sent to Longstreet during the afternoon and evening. Originally planning to use the First Corps in a flanking movement to the south of the Union position, the battering of Hill's two divisions on May 5 caused Lee to change his mind. Instead of moving along roads running parallel to the south, Longstreet was now ordered to move his two divisions from Richard's Shop up onto the Plank Road and reinforce Hill before dawn on the sixth, a maneuver that would entail a difficult night march of nearly ten miles. Despite several entreaties by Generals Heth and Wilcox during the night, Lee remained convinced that Longstreet would arrive before morning, therefore allowing the fought out Confederates to rest where they were. In his report, Heth recalled Hill's order regarding the subject: "My division bivouacked on the night of May 5 on the battlefield. I reported to the Lieutenant-General commanding and gave him a resume of affairs and was informed that the division would be relieved at daybreak by General James Longstreet's troops." At Union headquarters meanwhile, Grant and Meade were planning a massive coordinated attack against Hill's isolated command. The Federal

columns, consisting of all of Hancock's Corps, as well as Getty's Division of the Sixth Corps and Wadsworth's Division of the Fifth, were scheduled to move forward in unison at first light on the sixth.<sup>504</sup>

Back on the Plank Road, the survivors of Cooke's Brigade received orders to fall back and form a new line in support of Confederate artillery positioned near Widow Tapp's Field, which also served as Lee and Hill's headquarters. General Heth remembered the order in his report on the battle: "General Cooke's Brigade was now ordered to support and protect our artillery in position on the plank road." Moving out of their fighting positions, the troops were ordered to proceed rearward via a small farm track to the north of the roadway. In the dark and smoky woods, an interesting event occurred which was later recalled by Captain Sloan:

As we were retiring from our position, we got into a country-road, parallel to the "Plank-Road," and had proceeded but a short distance, when my attention was directed to a similar body of troops, marching quietly on the road with us; the night was very dark, and it was difficult to distinguish friend from foe. I felt some anxiety, as they seemed to possess uniform knapsacks and were of better appearance than our men, to know who they were. I therefore approached their column, and found to my utter astonishment that they were "blue-coats." I immediately rushed to [Lieutenant] Col. Whitfield, and informed him of our situation. He replied, "Impossible!" On close inspection, he found that they were really Federal troops. He drew his pistol, and, in a surprised and excited manner, called out: "Yes, they are Yankees! Shoot them boys! Shoot them!" Some few guns were fired; but as the surprise was so great both upon our part and that of our "Yankee brethren," a hasty retreat was made by both sides, and each soon lost the other in the darkness.

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<sup>504</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 706; Rhea, 262-82; James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

Following this strange encounter, which only underscored the need for additional protection of the artillery and Lee's headquarters, the regiment quietly made its way to its assigned position, a low ridge line north of the Plank Road and less than one mile from the front. Under Cooke's orders, the men began throwing up slight earthworks, something they had not bothered to do while in their previous position. Captain Sloan described the troops' exertions: "Our men began at once to fortify; and while we had no implements for the purpose, we succeeded, by the aid of our bayonets and tin cups, to build what proved to be a great protection." In this position, the exhausted officers and men of the regiment, minus those killed or wounded during the day's action, spent the remainder of the night in relative peace and quiet.<sup>505</sup>

As the first rays of sunlight pierced the thick foliage of the Wilderness, Longstreet's troops, who had been delayed by intense darkness and confusing roads, were nowhere to be seen. A few minutes before 5:00 a.m., the Union assault force, which included elements of seven divisions from three different corps, lurched forward towards Hill's two under strength and greatly disordered divisions. The results were predictable. Unable to hold their lines against this huge Federal force, the remnants of Heth and Wilcox's divisions were quickly forced back along the Plank Road. The slow retreat quickly turned into a rout as the Confederates attempted, in vain, to form a new line in the tangled woodland. The sounds of approaching battle roused the men of the Twenty-Seventh, who, having been re-supplied with ammunition during the night, quickly

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<sup>505</sup> Sloan, 82-83; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 705; Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 27-28; Jordan and Manarin, 6.

manned their slight earthworks and prepared to meet the new attack. In describing the situation, Captain Sloan stated: "After a severe contest a portion of Heth's and Wilcox's divisions were overpowered and forced to fall back; our brigade, under protection of our hastily constructed earthworks, held its position." In his report, Heth gave subtle praise to the brigade when he stated, "My division, except Cooke's Brigade, was for a time thrown into some confusion." Because of its location above the Tapp Field, Cooke's Brigade, which was generally arrayed facing toward the northeast, was initially confronted not by Hancock's troops but by elements of the Fifth Corps under General James Wadsworth, whose division launched its part of the grand attack from the north rather than the east. Advancing against Cooke's solid line and its supporting artillery, Wadsworth's men suffered heavy casualties and temporarily ground to a halt before veering left and colliding with Hancock's troops, further jumbling the already tightly packed Federal lines. Lieutenant Jones recalled the attack: "The skirmishers were thrown forward by day [but] owing to the enemy's pressing our [left] flank we had to draw in when they soon appeared in front to charge the batteries but were soon repulsed." Despite this initial success, Cooke's position was quickly put in jeopardy by the unstoppable tidal wave of enemy soldiers coming down the Plank Road toward the Tapp Field, which was crowded with several batteries of Lieutenant Colonel William Poague's Third Corps Artillery Battalion.<sup>506</sup>

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<sup>506</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 28; Sloan, 84; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 706; Clark, 446; Rhea, 283-95; Hess, 214-15.

Just at this critical moment, when all that stood between the Federals and General Lee's headquarters was Cooke's small brigade and Poague's artillerymen, the lead elements of the First Corps finally arrived on the battlefield. Colonel John Gregg's "Texas Brigade" quickly formed a battle line behind the guns and charged forward into the thick masses of the enemy. The attack staggered the Federals, who at this point had become jumbled and disorganized as a result of their own success and the difficult terrain. James Graham remembered this moment of the battle: "Just as we were flanked on each side and almost ready to retreat, from force of circumstances, Longstreet's Corps came up and the gallant charge of the Texas Brigade was made." As the Texans advanced, General Lee rode with them as if trying to lead the charge himself. After Gregg's men begged him to return to the rear, Lee finally relented and turned back towards his headquarters. The men of the Twenty-Seventh also reportedly took part in this "Lee to the Rear" episode, which apparently occurred within ten yards of the regiment. Lieutenant Graham described the incident:

The "Texans" were immediately thrown forward, and Gen. Lee who had just reached this point, impressed with the crisis, evidently resolved to charge with them. With his hat in his hand, he rode forward, when men of the brigade turning, shouted to him to go back or they would not go forward; men of our brigade also, jumped upon the works, and at the top of their voices urged the same; his horse was seized and further advance prevented.

While the men stood on the works shouting for Lee to return to the rear, Major Joseph Webb, second in the command of the regiment, was severely wounded in the left side and taken to the rear. The regiment was now down to only one remaining field officer.<sup>507</sup>

Following a short but deadly close quarter struggle, in which the Federals were temporarily thrown back from the field, Gregg's Brigade was virtually destroyed by overwhelming Union firepower. By this time, however, most of Longstreet's two divisions had arrived and slowly began to push the disorganized Federals back on both sides of the Plank Road. According to Captain Sloan, "In a short while the ground lost by our troops was recovered, and the enemy forced back to the position originally held by them." This sweeping change in the progress of the battle, although effected by troops of the First Corps, was made possible in part by the valiant stand of Cooke's Brigade. By keeping Wadsworth's troops from taking Widow Tapp's Field from the north, the men of the brigade ensured the immediate safety of Poague's guns and allowed Gregg's troops an open field from which to launch their counterattack. In addition, by temporarily keeping the Federals from overrunning Lee's headquarters, Cooke's defense may even have saved General Lee himself from death or capture. Of course, without the timely arrival of Longstreet's reinforcements, the role played by the Twenty-Seventh and its sister regiments would have proven but a futile gesture.<sup>508</sup>

With the Confederate line along the Orange Plank Road once again secure, Longstreet, reinforced by Anderson's Division of the Third Corps, initiated a flank attack

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<sup>507</sup> Clark, 446; James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Rhea, 295-308; Sloan, 85; Jordan and Manarin, 8.

<sup>508</sup> Sloan, 85; Rhea, 302-16.

on the Federal left utilizing a railroad cut which worked its way along the southern edge of the battlefield. Surprising the exhausted troops of Hancock's Second Corps, the Confederates rolled up the Federal line from south to north and pushed the entire left wing of the Army of the Potomac back towards the Brock Road. At this moment, around noon, just as Longstreet was initiating another attack that could possibly capture the Brock Road and rout half of the Union army, fate intervened. Leading fresh troops down the Plank Road, Longstreet was accidentally wounded by soldiers of William Mahone's Virginia Brigade, who were coming up from south following their successful flank attack. With the First Corps commander incapacitated with a near fatal bullet wound to the neck, the Confederate offensive ground to a halt. It would take Lee several hours to rearrange his scattered forces for another push at the Brock Road. By 5:00 p.m. the Federals had recovered from their shock and were ready for the attack, which was repulsed with heavy Confederate casualties. Thus ended the fighting on the southern portion of the battlefield. In Ewell's sector, meanwhile, the morning and afternoon witnessed desultory skirmishing between the two sides but no large scale attacks. Just before sunset, one of Ewell's brigade commanders, Brigadier General John Gordon launched a small attack against the left flank of Sedgwick's Sixth Corps but rapidly approaching darkness and Union reinforcements quickly stopped the Confederates' movement into the Union rear.<sup>509</sup>

Following Longstreet's arrival on the field, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina's role in the battle largely came to an end. For the rest of May 6, the men of Cooke's

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<sup>509</sup> Rhea, 351-74, 390-98, 404-25.

Brigade largely remained in reserve along with the other survivors of Heth and Wilcox's divisions. Eventually, these two divisions occupied the ground between the First Corps on the Plank Road and the Second Corps on the Orange Turnpike, providing a loose connection between the two halves of the Army of Northern Virginia and helping to dissuade Ambrose Burnside's Ninth Corps, which arrived on the battlefield during the morning hours, from contributing anything meaningful to the Union effort. Thus, the bloody battle of the Wilderness ended in a tactical stalemate with both armies remaining on the field and ready for a continuation of the contest on the morrow. Casualties were high for both sides. Lee entered the fight with around 65,000 men and lost over 10,000 killed, wounded and captured, while Grant suffered nearly 18,000 casualties out of a force of more than 120,000 men. Despite failing to drive the enemy from the field, the Confederates had succeeded in stopping Grant's offensive for the time being and inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy. Summing up the feelings of many soldiers in the regiment as well as the army, Private David Thompson described the current military situation to his mother: "We have whipped the yankees so far [and] have run them back at every turn but the fighting is not done yet." Private Thompson could not have been more correct, for there was indeed much more fighting to be done.<sup>510</sup>

During the two-day battle, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina had contributed greatly to the Confederate success of stopping Grant's first offensive thrust against Lee's

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<sup>510</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 6; Rhea, 315-16, 324-32, 435-40; James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; David Thompson, Field Hospital between Orange Court House and Fredericksburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, May 8, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

army. By steadfastly holding their precarious position along the Orange Plank Road during the afternoon and evening of May 5, the regiment helped assure that Hancock and Getty's troops would not overwhelm Hill's two divisions. If the Confederate defense had collapsed early enough, it is very possible that the Federals could have turned north and plowed into Ewell's open right flank, thereby dealing a devastating blow to the Army of Northern Virginia and possibly opening the way for a Union advance on Richmond. During the morning hours of May 6, as the rest of their division was routed from the battlefield, Cooke's Brigade remained in position and materially aided the First Corps's counterattack by temporarily holding on to Widow Tapp's Field, one of the few pieces of open ground anywhere in the Wilderness. In a letter written to his cousin in late May, Private Samuel Lockhart of Company G commented on the brigade's role in the battle: "Our Brigade has won herself a great name since this fight commenced; it has been complemented by Generals Lee, Hill, and Heth for her bravery and coolness in time of an engagement. We lost very heavily at the fight in the Wilderness; we lost nearly half of the Brigade in killed, wounded, and missing."<sup>511</sup>

The cost of these determined actions, as discussed by Private Lockhart, was extremely heavy, both to the regiment and to the brigade as a whole. As previously mentioned, Cooke's Brigade lost an estimated 900 men on May 5. By the end of the battle, according to James Graham, "of the 1,753 in the brigade for duty, as appeared by the report of the Inspector General made the day before, about 1,080 were killed or

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<sup>511</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Line of Breast Works near Hanover Court House, Virginia, to Martha Jane Breeze, Orange County, North Carolina?, May 30, 1864, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

wounded.” Of that number, the Twenty-Seventh had contributed at least 169 casualties, including twenty-two killed or mortally wounded and 147 wounded, one of whom was subsequently captured by the enemy. Company B suffered the heaviest casualties in the regiment with three men killed and nineteen wounded. In addition to the wounding of Major Webb, numerous company officers were wounded including Captains John Sloan, Calvin Herring, William Larkins, and Hopton Coor. Captain Larkins, only slightly wounded in the right leg, would return to command of Company I within a week, while the others would return to duty within several weeks or months. First Lieutenant James Graham, the avid letter writer and post-war regimental historian, received a painful wound in the left leg only a few inches above the knee which would keep him out of action until September. Along the lines of the brigade’s casualty figures, most of the regiment’s losses occurred during the sustained combat on May 5, during which both sides kept up a virtually constant, albeit mostly inaccurate, musketry fire for much of the afternoon and evening. Mercifully, most of the wounded from the Twenty-Seventh were only slightly injured, another result of the slight protective cover offered by the thick forest. In a letter to his mother in mid May, Private Thompson, recuperating from a bout of sickness in a Bedford County hospital, commented that “most of the boys [are] all slightly wounded.”<sup>512</sup>

“The morning of the 7<sup>th</sup> found us intrenched, and all day was consumed in desultory fighting.” Thus, one officer described the activity, or lack thereof, which

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<sup>512</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98; Clark, 446; Wagstaff, 191; McCaslin, 158; David Thompson, Hospital in Liberty, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, May 12, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

occurred on May 7. Both armies remained in sight of each other and continued erecting or strengthening their earthworks, something both Confederate and Union soldiers had, over time, learned would greatly reinforce their position and possibly save their lives. The days of open field fighting, although not altogether gone, were indeed numbered as the war entered its fourth year. The soldiers of Cooke's Brigade, or rather what was left of it, spent the day improving their earthworks and looking out for any sign of a renewed Federal attack in their area. Despite some skirmishing in their front, the men of the Twenty-Seventh, now down to perhaps 250 strong and most likely grateful for a day of relative peace following two days of bloody combat, remained passive during much of the morning and afternoon. Back at Confederate headquarters, Lee scanned reports from the front and tried to discover Grant and Meade's intentions now that their carefully orchestrated offensive had ground to a halt after only three days in the field.<sup>513</sup>

On the other side of the battlefield meanwhile, Union commanders spent the day pouring over maps of the region and initiating a movement that would take the Army of the Potomac around the firmly entrenched Confederates. Despite the failure of his efforts thus far, Grant remained determined to defeat Lee's army and push on to Richmond. The new plan called for the entire Federal force to push south towards the small hamlet of Spotsylvania Court House, thereby drawing the Confederate army out into more open

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<sup>513</sup> James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Gordon C. Rhea, *The Battles for Spotsylvania Court House and the Road to Yellow Tavern, May 7-12*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 1-21; the regiment probably numbered somewhere near 250 officers and men following the heavy casualties suffered on May 5-6 (this number is based upon the regiment containing around 400 men at the beginning of the campaign, which was suggested by Major Joseph Webb in his letter of early April, 1864 which was quoted and cited in Chapter 9).

ground where superior Union numbers would determine the issue. The preparations for this movement, which was scheduled to begin at nightfall, were almost impossible to keep secret from Confederate scouts and skirmishers. By the evening of the seventh, Lee had largely divined the Federal plan and formulated his own plans to combat it. The entire Army of Northern Virginia, beginning with the First Corps, now headed by Major General Richard Anderson, and followed by the Second and Third, would likewise move toward Spotsylvania beginning that night and continuing into the next day.<sup>514</sup>

For the soldiers of Hill's Third Corps, including the men of Cooke's Brigade, the first indication of an impending movement occurred late in the evening when they were ordered to sidle to the right in order to fill in Anderson's vacated works straddling the Orange Plank Road and the battlefield of the fifth. Lieutenant Kenneth Jones recalled the movement: "[We] remained in our works till late in the evening when we moved to the right and slept in line of battle." In describing the regiment's movement to the right, Captain Sloan recalled an event which not only would be remembered by veterans for many years to come, but also provided a good indication that Confederate morale remained high following their initial success in this campaign: "At dark we began to move slowly to the right, and after we had proceeded about one mile a rebel yell, as if a rushing mighty wind, rolled down upon us from the right of our lines. Our army was now in a continuous line of battle, and the cheering was taken up spontaneously by brigade after brigade until it swelled into one exulting roar of defiance."<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>514</sup> Rhea, *Spotsylvania*, 13-30.

<sup>515</sup> Sloan, 85-86; Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 29; Rhea, *Spotsylvania*, 29-30.

While the men of Cooke's Brigade kept a wary eye to their front and tried to get some sleep, the lead elements of the Army of Potomac were on the move towards Spotsylvania Court House. Beginning with Warren's Fifth Corps, the Federals marched south along Brock Road all night long, hoping to beat the Confederates to the small crossroads community and lure the enemy into open ground to the south. Meanwhile, in continuation of the day's mounted combat along Brock Road, Union and Confederate cavalry, under the command of Generals Phillip Sheridan and J.E.B. Stuart respectively, made ready to continue to battle it out for possession of the roadway near the small hamlet of Todd's Tavern, which lay partway between the Wilderness and Spotsylvania. By delaying the Federal movement long enough, the Southern riders hoped to provide Anderson's First Corps with a much better chance of reaching Spotsylvania first. Back within Confederate lines, Anderson's troops, miserable while temporarily resting in an area filled with smoke and the debris of battle, fortuitously started on their march for Spotsylvania five hours ahead of schedule. As dawn broke on May 8, the two armies were locked in a race for the small courthouse town.<sup>516</sup>

Throughout the early morning hours, Union cavalry and infantry steadily pushed back Stuart's Confederate cavalry in a largely dismounted engagement along Brock Road. Finally, a little after 8:00 a.m., the Federals reached a slight ridgeline known as Laurel Hill. If they could take the high ground they could beat the Confederates to Spotsylvania. Fortunately for the Army of Northern Virginia, Anderson's troops came up at just the right moment, relieved Stuart's cavalry and held the high ground against

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<sup>516</sup> Rhea, *Spotsylvania*, 30-44

several disjointed Union attacks. As the day continued, more of Anderson's troops, followed by Ewell's Corps, arrived and began throwing up stout earthworks, strengthening the line and firmly blocking the Union advance south. The Federals, unable to break through and exhausted from their nighttime march, dropped to the ground and likewise began to entrench.<sup>517</sup>

The Third Corps began the day with a change in command. For several days, General A.P. Hill had been suffering from a recurring illness. By the morning of the eighth, he was too sick to command. As a replacement, Lee chose Major General Jubal Early, one of Ewell's division commanders, to command the Third Corps, which had been heavily battered in the Wilderness. Early's orders for the day were to march his command south to Spotsylvania, rejoin the rest of the army in its new defensive position, and extend the Confederate lines to the right. Skirting Union cavalry and troops of the Second Corps near Todd's Tavern on Brock Road, Early's divisions, including Heth's, were forced to take an alternate route along Catharpin Road, which delayed their arrival until the evening of the ninth. Lieutenant Jones jotted down the day's events in his diary: "Soon after day the sharpshooters were thrown to the front to reconnoiter...we advanced through the woods for 1 1/2 or 2 miles came upon their works and found they had just gone, except a few cavalry who were fired into...remained there till evening when we were drawn in...the Brig moved to the right marching by the flank and we camped for the night." The next day, as elements of both armies continued to congregate near Spotsylvania, Cooke's Brigade, as well as the remainder of Heth's Division, continued

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<sup>517</sup> Ibid., 45-74.

their march via Shady Grove Church Road. Captain Sloan described the regiment's movement: "On our march of the 9<sup>th</sup> we were interrupted by several skirmishes, and were frequently shelled by the enemy. In the evening we reached Spotsylvania Court House, and were placed in line, without regard to alignment, a short distance to the left of the court-house building, where we at once proceeded to fortify." In a postwar newspaper article on the campaign, James Graham described the digging: "That night [we] threw up slight breastworks using bayonets, tin plates, and like singular implements for the purpose." Secure in their new position near the Confederate right flank, the men of the regiment "remained quiet till day."<sup>518</sup>

On the evening of May 9, Grant, stymied in front of Lee's new entrenched line, sent his Second Corps under Winfield Hancock around to the right and across the Po River in an effort to flank the Confederate left near Block House Bridge. On the morning of the tenth, in reaction to this flank movement, Lee devised a strategy to counterattack the enemy and throw him back across the river. With Henry Heth and William Mahone's divisions of the Third Corps in reserve near the courthouse, the Confederate commander ordered Mahone to hold the line of the Po near the bridge while Heth maneuvered to the south and west with a view of flanking Hancock's forces below the river and forcing them back. While Union detachments probed Mahone's new line in an attempt to find a weak spot, Heth's troops, including the men of Cooke's Brigade, and accompanied by General Early, proceeded to the south down Old Court House Road, crossed the Po,

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<sup>518</sup> Sloan, 86; Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 29-30; Rhea *Spotsylvania*, 89-96, 100-14; James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

turned north, and headed for Tally's Mill, which rested along Glady Run near Hancock's left flank. By late morning, while Heth's Division prepared to attack from the south, Federal commanders finally realized the predicament that the Second Corps found itself in. General Meade, under direction from Grant, ordered Hancock to evacuate his corps back across the Po before the Confederates could attack his isolated force. Leaving the division of Brigadier General Francis Barlow in position below the river near the Graves house as a rear guard, Hancock slowly withdrew his two remaining divisions across the river to safety. Barlow's troops, ensconced behind temporary earthworks and supported by several artillery batteries, kept a wary eye to their front and prepared to resist Heth's expected attack.<sup>519</sup>

After pushing back Barlow's skirmishers, Heth's Division launched its main attack between 2:30 and 3:00 p.m. Heth arrayed his four brigades in a double line with two brigades in each. In this arrangement, Cooke's Brigade occupied the left rear of the division, directly behind Davis' Brigade. Advancing across Glady Run and an open field beyond, the Confederates were subjected to a brutal artillery barrage, both from Barlow's guns and additional Second Corps batteries positioned across the Po. According to James Graham's postwar history, "We struck [the enemy] and drove them slowly back, till [they] concentrated in some previously constructed works, immediately in front of a Mrs. Graves house, with a large open field in front. The field bordered the stream crossed by them in the morning and was commanded by a heavy force of artillery, posted some distance on the other side." Passing through the artillery fire, Heth's troops surged

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<sup>519</sup> Rhea, *Spotsylvania*, 104-14, 120-32; Sloan, 87.

forward and approached the enemy's works just as Barlow's troops were in the process of evacuating across the river via several pontoon bridges. Due to this opportune timing, the Confederates were not subjected to a severe fire of musketry while they crossed the open field. Second Lieutenant Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, temporarily commanding Company G following the wounding of Lieutenant Graham and the absence of Captain Dickson due to sickness, described the regiment's part in the successful attack: "After driving them several miles we came upon their works and run them out of two lines and regained the road [the Shady Grove Church Road] that they held for a short time...we were under the heaviest cannonading I ever saw or expect to see, we charged across an open field  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile wide and carried the works while 3 batteries were playing on us all the time with grape and canister."<sup>520</sup>

While driving the outnumbered Federals from their works, the victorious Confederates captured one artillery piece as well as numerous prisoners. Adding to the confusion in the Union ranks, a large stand of woods caught fire during the height of the engagement, shrouding the landscape in smoke and further hurrying the Federals on their way back to the bridges. While the jubilant Confederates tried to keep up the pressure, Union artillery maintained an incessant fire into Heth's lines, effectively halting his pursuit and allowing Barlow's brigades to withdraw across the river. By 5:00 the engagement was over. Heth's troops, soon joined by Mahone's Division, entrenched

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<sup>520</sup> James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, Spotsylvania Court House, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, May 17, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Rhea, *Spotsylvania*, 132-40.

along Shady Grove Church Road and maintained a firm hold on Lee's left flank. Barlow's Division, minus nearly 1,000 casualties, managed to get back across the pontoon bridges and reform on the north bank of the Po under cover of the Second Corps artillery, which continued to pummel Early's distant lines until dark. In his report of the engagement, General Heth proudly stated:

[My division] made a flank movement to dislodge the enemy, who had extended his right across the Po River...After some slight skirmishing, the enemy was attacked and driven from several lines of breastworks. In this attack one piece of artillery was captured...For its gallant conduct on this occasion I was requested by the commanding General and Lieutenant-General Hill to thank my division, which was done in General Orders.<sup>521</sup>

Casualties during this minor battle were relatively light for Cooke's Brigade, which luckily maintained its rear rank position throughout the engagement. By contrast, Davis and Kirkland's brigades, positioned in the front rank, incurred heavier but acceptable losses. The Twenty-Seventh North Carolina suffered one man killed and six wounded, mostly concentrated in Companies C, F and G. In an ironic twist of fate, Ensign William Story, the regimental color bearer and the only member of the Color Guard to emerge unscathed from the battle of Bristoe Station, was among the wounded. In addition, General Cooke, as usual leading his brigade from the front, was slightly injured but refused to relinquish command. Overall, the battle had been a resounding success. Hancock's flank movement had been stopped and thrown back across the Po, securing Lee's left and once again stymieing Grant's offensive. While these events

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<sup>521</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 706; Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 30-31; Sloan, 87; Rhea, *Spotsylvania*, 137-42, 185; James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Hess, 217-22.

transpired on the Confederate left, Federal attacks were launched against Anderson's position on Laurel Hill and a part of Ewell's line known as the "Mule Shoe." Despite some initial success at the "Mule Shoe" salient, each Union attack of the day was eventually repulsed and the Confederate line restored by nightfall.<sup>522</sup>

After dark, with the line of the Po River now secure and Hancock's troops sent to other sections of the battlefield, Lee ordered Early to return Heth's Division to its original position near the courthouse and the Confederate right flank. Captain Sloan of Company B described the movement: "We were finally withdrawn and marched back to our position on the main lines, after we had recovered the lost ground and forced the enemy to relinquish their temporary advantage." In summing up his report of the day's actions, General Heth stated: "On the night of May 10 the division recrossed the Po River and took position behind breastworks immediately in front of Spotsylvania Court-House."<sup>523</sup>

During the remainder of the rival armies' stay in and around Spotsylvania, Cooke's Brigade played a very limited role in operations, the troops largely remaining within their defensive earthworks near the courthouse. From this position, the men of the regiment, along with the rest of Heth's Division, covered the Fredericksburg Road and protected Lee's right from any Union attack against that section of the line. Other than participating in an occasional skirmish and dodging Federal artillery projectiles, the officers and men were kept relatively busy improving their breastworks, trying to keep dry amidst nearly constant rain, and keeping their eyes open for an expected enemy assault on their lines. Writing to his sister on May 17, Lieutenant Thomas Strayhorn

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<sup>522</sup> Rhea, *Spotsylvania*, 141-188; Sloan, 87; Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

<sup>523</sup> Sloan, 87-88; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 707; Rhea, *Spotsylvania*, 140-50, 188.

commented, “We have been lying in our works night and day since last Friday [May 11].” In describing the steady Union artillery fire, Captain Sloan wrote, “They made daily practice of our works, and endeavored to batter down and destroy the buildings in the village. They appeared to have a special spite at the little brick church immediately in rear of our regiment, occupied by our [Assistant] Surgeon (Dr. Leander Hunt).” Despite this heavy fire leveled against their lines, the regiment suffered very few casualties during this time. As of May 21, when the Army of Northern Virginia moved south, the Twenty-Seventh had lost only one man wounded and one captured in addition to those lost in battle on the tenth.<sup>524</sup>

While Cooke’s Brigade was only lightly engaged during this time, the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House continued with unabated fury along other parts of the line. At dawn of May 12, amid heavy rain and thick fog, a massive Union assault, consisting of the entire Second Corps and elements of the Sixth, swept down upon Ewell’s “Mule Shoe” salient, breaching the defenses and capturing most of Major General Edward Johnson’s Division. Despite the initial rout, Lee quickly ordered up troops from other sections of the line and initiated a savage counterattack that kept the victorious Federals stymied at the captured earthworks. Throughout the remainder of the day and into the night, Confederate and Union soldiers fought each other at extremely close range for possession of the earthworks at a crook in the line known forever after as the “Bloody

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<sup>524</sup> Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, Spotsylvania Court House, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, May 17, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Sloan, 88; Jordan and Manarin, 7-98; Rhea, *Spotsylvania*, 216, 297.

Angle.” Despite overwhelming numbers, confusion and extremely heavy Confederate fire kept the Union attackers from achieving anything beyond a continued stalemate.<sup>525</sup>

During the late morning and early afternoon, Ambrose Burnside’s Union Ninth Corps initiated its own attack against Early’s lines in conjunction with renewed action at the salient. This attack fell on elements of Heth and Wilcox’s divisions positioned to the north of Cooke’s location. Following the repulse of this initial attack, Lee, desperate to take pressure off his hard-pressed center and possibly regain the initiative, ordered Early to initiate a counterattack against Burnside’s left flank. This attack, launched by the brigades of James Lane and David Weisiger, was only partly successful and resulted in heavy losses to both sides. Later in the day, after Lane’s North Carolinians and Weisiger’s Virginians had returned to their lines, Early ordered Cooke’s Brigade to join Weisiger’s in a probe of Burnside’s lines along Fredericksburg Road. Facing this probing action was Colonel Elisha Marshall’s Provisional Brigade, which was made up of relatively inexperienced heavy artillerymen and dismounted cavalry from New York and Pennsylvania. Captain Sloan described the brief but successful action: “We leaped over our works and formed outside of them...we attacked the enemy, and drove them from two lines into a third. Finding that they were getting reinforcements, and in a fortified position, we were gradually withdrawn to our former position on the main lines.” Despite failing to drive the enemy from his position, the attack had succeeded in capturing numerous prisoners and helping to convince Burnside to stop his attacks and pull his troops back into a defensive position. In describing the role of Cooke’s Brigade

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<sup>525</sup> Rhea, *Spotsylvania*, 232-82.

in the brief action, General Heth stated: "Cooke's Brigade on this day was engaged in front of our line of works and, in connection with other troops, not of my division, succeeded in driving the enemy from two lines of works and capturing many prisoners." Casualties for the operation were negligible, at least within the Twenty-Seventh. According to regimental records, only one man was lost. Private Jonathan May of Company F was captured. Sadly, May would die of disease at Point Lookout, Maryland in August of 1864. When the troops returned to their earthworks in the evening, the fighting on this section of the field had ended for the day.<sup>526</sup>

By dawn of the thirteenth, following a continuous and bloody fight of nearly twenty-three hours, Ewell had pulled the remnants of his corps back to a new line centered on the Harrison house. Now the Confederate defenses formed an extremely secure L shaped line with Anderson still entrenched on Laurel Hill, Ewell in the center and Early maintaining his position from Ewell's right south across Fredericksburg Road and beyond. Despite repeated attacks against Lee's lines and heavy casualties on both sides, Grant and Meade had failed to defeat the Army of Northern Virginia. The campaign would continue. Meanwhile, the officers and men of Cooke's Brigade continued their now daily routine of improving their earthworks and maintaining a strict lookout to their front. Lieutenant Jones summed up the lack of activity during these days in his diary entries for May 13-17: "quiet except skirmish firing and some canoneering." While Grant rested his exhausted army and planned for a continuation of the campaign,

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<sup>526</sup> Sloan, 89-90; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 707; Rhea, *Spotsylvania*, 294-302; Jordan and Manarin, 7-98; James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

the Confederates likewise recovered from their recent exertions and tried to divine where the next Union assault would fall. In describing the daily life of the men behind the earthworks during their stay at Spotsylvania, James Graham wrote: "During all these days, day and night in the trenches, our rations reduced, we passed the time when not fighting with such cheerfulness as the situation would allow, or we could summon for the occasion. The work however was telling on our men, who were becoming much fagged."<sup>527</sup>

On the morning of May 18, following nearly a week of maneuvering in an attempt to find a weak spot in Lee's line, Grant decided on another frontal assault against the Confederate center. Advancing against Ewell's strong defenses at the base of the old "Mule Shoe," elements of Hancock's Second Corps and Horatio Wright's Sixth became bogged down in and among the old Confederate earthworks and trenches that these same men had fought over on the twelfth. Once within range of Confederate artillery the Union attack started to come apart amid incessant shelling and heavy casualties. After barely an hour it was over. The Army of the Potomac was simply too exhausted and demoralized from recent fighting to breach the Confederate lines, which were, in reality, too strong to be attacked successfully without an immense loss of life. During the day, the guns of Warren's Fifth Corps, which had moved into position opposite Early's entrenchments on the fourteenth, in conjunction with Burnside's artillery, unleashed a

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<sup>527</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 31-32; Rhea, *Spotsylvania*, 305-27; Sloan, 90; James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

massive bombardment against Lee's right. Despite the intensity of the shelling, Cooke's Brigade, in addition to the rest of the Confederates along the line, suffered few casualties, a result of their well-constructed earthworks. In reporting on the bombardment, General Heth stated: "On May 18 the division was exposed to a severe shelling for two hours or more, but, fortunately, our losses were small." Lieutenant Jones, hunkered down alongside the men of Company I, commented on the events of the day in his diary: "Severe cannonading, the enemy attempted a charge on our left but were repulsed." With this rebuff and a total loss of more than 18,000 casualties since arriving at Spotsylvania, Grant looked for another way of getting around Lee's army and finding a more agreeable location in which to fight.<sup>528</sup>

By May 20, following a small but severe engagement at Harris' Farm, the result of a Confederate reconnaissance operation to the north of the battlefield, the Union command finally settled on a new offensive scheme. By pushing Hancock's Corps to the east and then south via the village of Bowling Green, Grant hoped to cut around Lee's right flank and beat the Confederates to the next major defensive position on the road to Richmond, the North Anna River. If the Army of the Potomac could cut Lee's army off from its routes of supply and deal it a heavy blow, the Confederate capital would necessarily fall soon after. Across Virginia, meanwhile, Grant's other offensive elements had not lived up to expectations. East of Richmond, Benjamin Butler's Army of the James had been stymied by a numerically inferior Confederate force on the Bermuda

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<sup>528</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 707; Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 32; Gordon C. Rhea, *To The North Anna River: Grant and Lee, May 13-25*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 95-163.

Hundred peninsula while in the Shenandoah Valley General Franz Sigel had been routed by a Confederate army under the command of Major General John C. Breckinridge at the Battle of New Market. For the Union war effort in Virginia to continue to any effect, Grant had to keep up the pressure on Lee and, given the failures of the previous two weeks, it had become obvious that Spotsylvania County was not the place to accomplish that goal. In the early morning hours of May 21, the Second Corps, followed by the rest of the army, set out for the North Anna.<sup>529</sup>

Within Confederate lines, meanwhile, the campaign continued as before with the army largely hunkered down behind their defenses waiting for another Union assault. Cooke's Brigade remained in position behind its earthworks ready to fight or move out at a moments warning. Captain Sloan stated: "We had now completed twelve days of battle at Spotsylvania, and at no time, day or night, did the firing on the lines entirely cease." For Robert E. Lee, whose army had lost close to 12,000 men during the past two weeks, Grant's movements remained puzzling. By the morning of the twenty-first, however, it became obvious that the Federals were sidestepping around the Army of Northern Virginia once again. Ewell's Corps, still in position on the Confederate left and somewhat rested after the fighting at Harris' Farm two days before, received orders to begin the march to the south via the Telegraph Road in an attempt to beat the Federals to the North Anna. The Third Corps, once again commanded by General A.P. Hill, as well as Anderson's First Corps would follow along in the afternoon and evening. Anderson would follow Ewell's route while Hill would march his troops to the west along lesser

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<sup>529</sup> Rhea, *North Anna River*, 164-97, 212-54.

roads via the town of Chilesburg. By late morning, the men of the Twenty-Seventh began to suspect that a movement was in the offing. “Recd orders to be ready to move at 12 o’clock (p.m.), Lieutenant Jones recalled, “during the evening a pretty heavy cannonading...formed line after dark, marched about 10 miles in the direction of Hanover Junction and camped for the night,” most likely near Chilesburg.<sup>530</sup>

The officers and men of the regiment, exhausted from lack of sleep and the need for continual vigilance during the previous two weeks, were roused very early the next morning after only a quick rest and, with the regimental band placed in the front of the column, resumed their hurried march to the south. Captain Sloan of Company B described the men’s progress: “During the night and day of the 22<sup>nd</sup>, we continued our toilsome march. On these long marches, to prevent straggling, we are frequently halted for a rest, and this opportunity is taken by those who have fallen back to catch up with their commands.” On the Telegraph Road meanwhile, Ewell and Anderson’s troops were also making good time while evading the slow moving Union army, most of which continued to march parallel along roads further to the east. After several hours of hard marching, Cooke’s Brigade and the rest of Hill’s Corps crossed the North Anna River at Island Ford, reached the Virginia Central Railroad and went into bivouac. In his diary, Lieutenant Jones wrote, “Formed early and after hard marching bivouacked [within] 7 miles of [Hanover] Junction on Cen RR.” Ewell’s Second Corps likewise crossed to the south side of the river on the morning of the twenty-second, several miles downstream

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<sup>530</sup> Sloan, 91; Kenneth Rayner Jones, “Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones,” Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, 32; Rhea, *North Anna River*, 212-55.

and much closer to Hanover Junction, while Anderson managed to get his troops across by noon. The Army of Northern Virginia, blessed with more direct roads and a more compact force, had beaten the Federals to the North Anna. It now remained to be seen whether Grant would attack the Confederates in this new position.<sup>531</sup>

Throughout the day on May 23, while Lee's army rested in its new positions south of the North Anna, the Army of the Potomac converged upon Chesterfield Station and Mt. Carmel Church to the north of the river in preparation for a crossing. While the Union Second and Ninth Corps tested the fords and bridges opposite Anderson and Ewell's troops, Gouverneur Warren's Fifth Corps managed to get across the river at Jericho Mills and threaten Lee's left, held by Wilcox's Division. Following a badly managed battle, in which Wilcox failed to drive the enemy into the river, the entire Third Corps fell back to the east, closer to Hanover Junction and the rest of the army. According to General Heth's report on the operation, his division was supposed to aid Wilcox in the attack but through a mix up in orders failed to support him in time. Heth stated:

On May 23 I was directed to support Major-General Wilcox in an attack he was ordered to make on the Fifth (Federal) Corps near Noel's Turnout on the Virginia Central Railroad. I found my division in line of battle, in supporting distance in rear of Wilcox's Division. Seeing some confusion existing on the left of Wilcox's line, I gave the necessary orders for my division to move rapidly forward, but before these orders were communicated, I found that my entire division was moving by the right

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<sup>531</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 32; Sloan, 92; Rhea, *North Anna River*, 255-79; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 707; James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

flank. On galloping to the right to ascertain why and by whose order this change in its direction had been made, I found General Wilcox on the right of my division and that the division was by his order, which, under existing circumstances, I considered proper. Night soon came on and no further attack could be made.

Lee laid much of the blame for this costly failure at the foot of A.P. Hill, who had ordered Wilcox's lone division into the fray without proper reinforcements. By the time Heth's troops came onto the field, it was too late; the battle had been already been lost. By the evening of the twenty-third, two Union corps had crossed the river in strength on the Confederate left, forcing Lee to re-think his defensive plans.<sup>532</sup>

During the night, the men of the Twenty-Seventh, as well as the rest of Heth's Division, fell back to Anderson Tavern on the Virginia Central Railroad and went into temporary bivouac. At Confederate headquarters, meanwhile, Lee and his corps commanders conducted a hurried conference to decide on a course of action. Choosing between retreat and a continued defensive action at the North Anna, Lee, heavily influenced by his chief engineer, Martin Smith, chose the latter. Smith laid out a new defensive line, which would take advantage of the terrain and negate Grant's success so far. The new line resembled an inverted V and was anchored on the North Anna near Ox Ford. From the tip, Anderson and Ewell's corps would extend the line to the east and south, covering Hanover Junction and keeping Hancock and Burnside occupied. Meanwhile, on the Confederate left, Hill's Corps would continue the line from Ox Ford south to the Little River, thereby securing Lee's left flank. The completed line divided the Army of the Potomac into two halves, each several miles apart, separated by a fast

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<sup>532</sup> Rhea, *North Anna River*, 280-319; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 707-708.

flowing river, and unable to support the other, while giving the Confederate defenders good interior lines of communication and the ability to reinforce any part of the line quickly in case of an emergency. Heth's Division was assigned to the left of the Third Corps' line and therefore stretched from the Virginia Central Railroad to the Little River, firmly anchoring the Confederate left flank. Cooke's Brigade was apparently positioned quite close to the river as Lieutenant Jones mentioned falling back to the "Little R. Bridge" during the night. In describing this new line, their part of which the men of the regiment set about constructing during the rest of the night and into the next day, Captain Sloan commented, "General Lee formed his lines with his left resting on Little River, and his right near the North Anna below the enemy, covering Hanover Junction. Here we awaited attack. Owing to our well selected position, Grant could not get at our flanks; and to take us by direct assault, after his bitter experience at Spotsylvania, caused him to pause, ponder, study and plan."<sup>533</sup>

For the next three days, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina hunkered down behind their strong earthworks and awaited an enemy attack that never came, at least not in their sector. Despite relatively minor engagements at both ends of the Confederate line on May 24, Grant's realization of his awkward position and Lee's sudden bout of sickness, which confined him to his tent for much of the battle, robbed the Confederates of a superb chance to crush part of the divided Union army and

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<sup>533</sup> Sloan, 94; Rhea, *North Anna River*, 319-27; James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 708; Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 33.

meant that the campaign would not be decided here at the North Anna. The soldiers of Cooke's Brigade, spared the daily contact with the enemy witnessed at the Wilderness and Spotsylvania, remained quiet and tried to recover as best they could from the continuous fighting and marching of the previous three weeks. In describing the conditions prevalent in the regiment at this time, Second Lieutenant Strayhorn, still commanding Company G, wrote to his sister: "We have gone through a great deal of hard service either marching or lying in line of battle...My health has been and is good with the exception of the diarrhea for the last few days...I have been reduced in flesh considerably [and am] lousy more than half my time for want of clean clothes."<sup>534</sup>

Despite nearly constant activity, short rations, little rest, and an upsurge of sickness within the ranks, the men remained in good spirits and were definitely coming to appreciate the use of defensive earthworks as well as their effect upon the enemy. Private Samuel Lockhart of Strayhorn's company told his cousin, "Our troops are in fine spirits and tolerable good health, and less straggling that I ever saw before." Lockhart continued, "Although it does not make much difference how tired I am, I am always ready to throw up breast works for they are a great protection in time of an engagement." In commenting on the men's impression of the enemy and their failure to mount a major attack at the North Anna, Lieutenant Strayhorn stated: "Grant would have fought us but his troops were so much demoralized and disheartened the officers could not work them up to charge our works." In this frame of mind, the men of the regiment passed the time

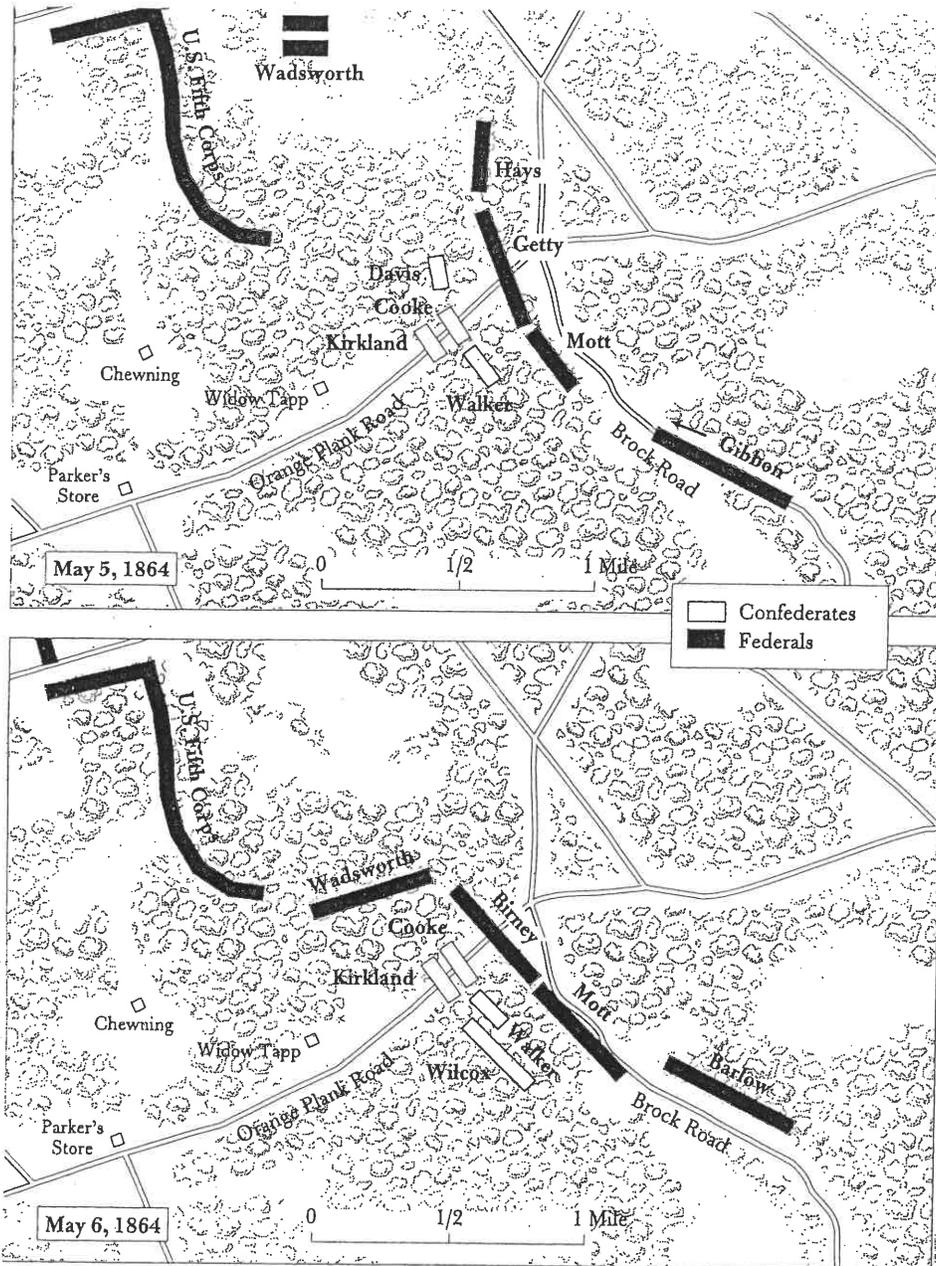
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<sup>534</sup> Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, Mechanicsville, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, May 29, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Rhea, *North Anna River*, 325-74; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 708.

until the morning of May 27 when it became apparent that the Army of the Potomac was once again in motion, endeavoring to slip around Lee's right and continue the campaign towards Richmond.<sup>535</sup>

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<sup>535</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Line of Breast Works near Hanover Court House, Virginia, to Martha Jane Breeze, Orange County, North Carolina, May 30, 1864, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, Mechanicsville, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, May 29, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 33.



The Battle of the Wilderness, May 5-6, 1864<sup>536</sup>

<sup>536</sup> Hess, 210.

## Chapter 11—June–July, 1864

**“Brigade after brigade was hurled against us, until the ground in our front was literally covered with their dead and wounded.”**

**– Captain John A. Sloan, Company B<sup>537</sup>**

Beginning on the night of May 26, the Army of the Potomac was once again in motion. Faced with continued stalemate at the North Anna River, Grant and Meade planned to proceed with another flanking movement that would hopefully bring the two armies into contact on a more agreeable battlefield closer to Richmond. Re-crossing the river under the cover of darkness, the Federals marched southeast toward Dabney and Newcastle Ferries on the Pamunkey River, at which points they could cross well below the Confederates before reappearing on the enemy’s flank. Following a brief rest, the various Union corps resumed the march on the morning of the twenty-seventh. The Sixth Corps arrived opposite Hanover Court House that evening while Union cavalry reconnoitered the region south of the Pamunkey. Within Confederate lines meanwhile, Lee’s cavalry soon discovered the enemy’s movements, necessitating another march south in order to arrest the enemy’s progress and block any attack on Richmond. During the previous week, Lee’s army had been reinforced by the return of General George Pickett’s Division of the First Corps as well as the arrival of John C. Breckinridge’s small division from the Shenandoah Valley and the gradual return of sick and slightly wounded soldiers to their units. By the morning of May 27, the reinforced Army of Northern Virginia, which once again numbered more than 60,000 men, was in motion to the south,

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<sup>537</sup> Sloan, 96.

roughly paralleling the Union movement. Lee ordered his corps commanders to congregate near Hughes' Crossroads, southwest of Hanover Court House, by evening and planned to take up a strong defensive position along the banks of Totopotomoy Creek in the days to come.<sup>538</sup>

The officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina were awakened early on May 27 and quickly formed into marching column. Along with the rest of the Third Corps, Cooke's Brigade spent most of the day marching south along the tracks of the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad, traversing an area that they had become quite familiar with during their previous year's service guarding the various railroad and wagon bridges in the region. Passing through Taylorsville and crossing the South Anna River, the troops bivouacked for the night within one mile of Ashland. According to Lieutenant Kenneth Jones of Company I, this was "the first night we missed sleeping in line of battle since the 4<sup>th</sup> (of May)," a testament to just how rough life in the army had become during the past month. At 3 a.m. on the twenty-eighth, the troops were once again roused and continued the march, Hill's Corps passing through Hughes' Crossroads and Atlee's Station before halting about one mile north of Shady Grove Church and throwing up temporary breastworks. In this position, barely six miles from Richmond, the Third Corps constituted a reserve for the army while Early, now

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<sup>538</sup> Gordon C. Rhea, *Cold Harbor: Grant and Lee, May 26-June 3, 1864*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 1-60; Sloan, 94-95.

commanding Ewell's Corps, as well as Anderson and Breckinridge's troops continued to the east and north toward the south bank of Totopotomoy Creek.<sup>539</sup>

The morning of May 29 found both armies in motion towards each other. The slow moving Army of the Potomac, soon to be reinforced by elements of the Eighteenth Corps under General William Smith sent from Butler's Army of the James, finished its crossing of the Pamunkey and edged south and west in search of the new Confederate line. Lee's army meanwhile, formed a strong defensive position along the south bank of Totopotomoy Creek running from Atlee's Station on the left to Pole Green Church and Hundley's Corner on the right. The defenders quickly set about constructing strong earthworks and positioning artillery to sweep the open ground on the north side of the creek. Hill's Corps was placed on the left of this new defensive line. Facing to the north, Heth's Division was placed roughly in the center of Hill's Corps. The men of the Twenty-Seventh, settled into their new position, cooked what rations they could get their hands on, largely bacon and hardtack, and set about transforming their simple rifle pits into a formidable line of breastworks. Writing to his cousin the next morning, Private Samuel Lockhart described the men's exertions: "I am very much fatigued and worn out, marching and throwing up fortifications...We commenced working last night about 9 o'clock and worked until about 1 o'clock this morning, and we made a splendid work...if [the enemy] attacks us in our works, we will be apt to make a good many of them bite the dust." Lockhart's commanding officer, Lieutenant Thomas Strayhorn, was also confident

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<sup>539</sup> Kenneth Rayner Jones, "Diary of Kenneth Rayner Jones," Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 33; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 708; Rhea, *Cold Harbor*, 61-91.

of holding the position but worried that the enemy might simply conduct another flank movement instead of attacking: “I am getting tired of this protracted fighting and I believe I express the desire of the Army for Grant to attack us and fight it out at once and not slide round our right wing so much.”<sup>540</sup>

Strayhorn’s fears were well founded and ultimately proven correct. During the next several days, as Grant and Meade positioned their army across Totopotomoy Creek and once again attempted to flank the Confederate line on the right, Cooke’s Brigade, along with the rest of Heth’s Division, slowly sidled down the line to the right as both armies moved in parallel unison across the heavily wooded and swampy landscape of Hanover County. As Warren and Burnside’s Union corps crossed the creek and aimed for the Confederate right flank, Lee ordered Early and Anderson to block their progress, initiating a small but deadly engagement near Bethesda Church on May 30, which accomplished nothing but additional casualties. As the lines were slowly drawn to the south and east, Lieutenant Graham, in his postwar history, wrote, “we moved almost in a line of battle, side by side, hardly out of gunshot, fighting daily until our flank neared the Chickahominy—our brigade during this time getting fully its share of the work, having been engaged near Atlees, on the Totopotomoy Creek, and near Polegreen Church.”

During each of these moves, the men of the regiment were forced to erect new breastworks or improve those already constructed by other troops and participate in daily

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<sup>540</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, near Hanover Court House, Virginia, to Martha Jane Breeze, Orange County, North Carolina, May 30, 1864, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, near Mechanicsville, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, May 29, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Rhea, *Cold Harbor*, 93-113.

skirmishing with the enemy to their front, repulsing numerous Union probes in the process. By the evening of May 31, the regiment was positioned in previously constructed earthworks near Pole Green Church, which now marked roughly the center of the Confederate line. About 200 yards to their front were elements of Hancock's Second and Burnside's Ninth Corps, who were likewise dug in and awaiting further orders.<sup>541</sup>

During the day and into the night, Grant and Lee both looked to break the deadlock that was once again engulfing their armies. Several miles to the southeast of Bethesda Church was an obscure country crossroads named Cold Harbor. Both sides now turned their attention to this location, which offered the Federals a good chance to finally outflank Lee's army and push them into the Chickahominy River, thereby opening Richmond to capture. The Federals acted first by sending Horatio Wright's Sixth Corps from the extreme Union right on a circuitous march behind the Army of the Potomac towards Cold Harbor. Wright was to meet up with Phillip Sheridan's Cavalry Corps, which had already seized the crossroads from a small force of Confederate cavalry, and hold it at all costs. Lee, seeing this threat to his right, quickly ordered Anderson's First Corps, as well as Robert Hoke's newly arrived division, to not only block the enemy's attack but to launch a counterattack of their own that could destroy the isolated Union force and turn the tables on Grant. As Anderson and Wright's troops marched south, the men of the Twenty-Seventh, while constantly keeping a wary eye to the front, tried to rest

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<sup>541</sup> James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Rhea, *Cold Harbor*, 119-81; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 708; Hess, 226.

amid the occasional crack of a sharpshooter's rifle or the distant report of an artillery piece.<sup>542</sup>

On June 1, while the battle for possession of Cold Harbor raged to the south, Union troops of Brigadier General John Gibbon's Second Corps Division launched a series of probing attacks against Heth's line near Pole Green Church. The Union attackers, including four companies of the green Thirty-Sixth Wisconsin, as well as the whole of the Seventh Michigan and the Forty-Second New York, faced off against the majority of Cooke and Kirkland's brigades. Advancing across an open field, the soldiers of Colonel Boyd McKeen's Brigade never stood a chance of breaching the Confederate line. Buffeted by artillery fire at a range of 200 yards, the veteran Michiganders and New Yorkers hit the ground and refused to go any further. At a range of barely fifty yards, the muskets of the two Confederate brigades ripped apart the small Wisconsin battalion, which immediately wavered before likewise taking cover on the ground and returning fire. For the next three hours, the soldiers of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina helped keep the enemy pinned down in front of the earthworks. Finally, around dusk, Cooke ordered the Fifteenth North Carolina over the works to skirmish with the remaining enemy. They quickly returned with twenty-five prisoners. Overall, McKeen lost more than 170 men in the failed attack. Confederate losses were very slight, perhaps totaling twenty wounded among the nine defending regiments. The only loss within the Twenty-Seventh was Second Lieutenant Charles Campbell of Company B. Wounded during the attack, Campbell was taken to the rear only to die of his wounds the next day. As

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<sup>542</sup> Rhea, *Cold Harbor*, 170-94.

Campbell was being removed to the hospital, Captain Sloan related, “he passed me on his litter, he stretched out his almost pulseless arm and remarked, “Goodbye, Captain; if I don’t come back, tell them I fell fighting at the front.” The troops received praise from Generals Heth and Lee for their defensive action, however brief and one-sided it may have been. In his official report of the engagement, Heth wrote: “One June 1 the enemy assailed the works held by Cooke’s and Kirkland’s Brigades. The assault was easily repulsed, the enemy leaving a number of dead and wounded in front of the works.” Included in his nightly update to Secretary of War James A. Seddon, Lee commented, “This afternoon the enemy attacked Genl Heth and were handsomely repulsed by [Generals John R.] Cooke and [William W.] Kirkland’s brigades.”<sup>543</sup>

While the men of Cooke’s Brigade helped slaughter McKeen’s small assault force at Pole Green Church, important events transpired at Cold Harbor. After a dawn attack by Anderson and Hoke failed to crush Sheridan’s cavalry force at the crossroads, Union reinforcements, in the form of Wright’s Sixth Corps later reinforced by William Smith’s Eighteenth Corps, counterattacked the newly established Confederate line to the west. Despite heavy Union casualties, the attackers managed to breach Hoke’s line and forced the defenders to fall back slightly before darkness and confusion within the Federal ranks brought an end to the fighting. Around 7:00 p.m., just as Heth’s men drove back McKeen’s probe, Early, whose corps was positioned to the right of Hill’s men, initiated an attack on the juncture between the Union Fifth and Ninth Corps, located near

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<sup>543</sup> Hess, 226-28; Sloan, 95; Captain Sloan had only recently returned from the hospital following his slight wounding at the Battle of the Wilderness; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 708; Dowdey, 760.

Magnolia Swamp. Utilizing the divisions of Rodes and Gordon, Early managed to drive in the Union skirmishers and bend back Burnside's left flank before confusion and heavy Federal fire brought an end to the fighting. By nightfall, the lines had stabilized and the Confederates, from Hill's Corps on the left to Hoke's Division on the right, consolidated their positions and continued strengthening their earthworks and artillery emplacements in preparation for any further Union attacks.<sup>544</sup>

Throughout the night and into the next day, both armies transferred large numbers of troops to different sectors of the emerging battlefield. Grant, hoping to launch one grand assault at Cold Harbor that could break the Confederate line and open the road to Richmond, sent the veteran Second Corps from his right to the extreme left, thus massing three corps for the assault he hoped to initiate that day. This Union move forced Lee to send two of Hill's Divisions, under William Mahone and Camdus Wilcox, as well as Breckinridge's command, from the left to the right in order to reinforce the lines near Cold Harbor. These movements meant that Heth's Division, now temporarily attached to Early's Second Corps, held the left flank of Lee's army. Opposing Heth remained Ambrose Burnside's hard luck Ninth Corps, which now held the extreme right of the Army of the Potomac. Once it became apparent that Hancock's troops, slowed by extreme heat and congested roads, would not reach their jumping off point in time to participate in the scheduled attack, Grant delayed the offensive until 4:30 a.m. on June 3.

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<sup>544</sup> Rhea, *Cold Harbor*, 195-270.

This delay was a god send for the Confederates, who were now given twenty-four hours to improve and reinforce their lines.<sup>545</sup>

Despite the absence of battle at Cold Harbor on June 2, during the afternoon Early's Corps and Heth's Division launched a flank attack against the Union Ninth Corps near Bethesda Church. Around 1:00 p.m. Burnside received orders from Grant and Meade to refuse his right flank along the Shady Grove Church Road. This maneuver required the Ninth Corps to abandon its advanced picket lines and pull back to the east and south. Seeing the Federals in his front withdrawing, Early ordered his three divisions, as well as Heth, to attack at once. Situated to the north of Shady Grove Church Road, Heth's brigades would have to wheel to the right as they advanced in order to come into contact with the Federals. It was Early's intention that Heth's Division, with Cooke's Brigade positioned on the left of the line, hit the enemy in the flank and rear while his troops attacked them in front. Advancing at about 3:00 p.m., the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, as well as its sister regiments, left the cover of its earthworks and marched through a thick forest, the men maintaining their alignment as well as possible. The troops quickly located and captured the now abandoned Federal works. Moving forward once again, Cooke's men were buffeted by a heavy rainstorm before finally nearing the Shady Grove Road and the open fields of the Armstrong farm. During the advance, Rodes' Division to Heth's right had fallen behind and was now nowhere to be seen. Nevertheless, Heth continued the attack with Kirkland and Davis' brigades. Cooke's men on the far left tried to conform to the movement but quickly became

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<sup>545</sup> Ibid., 279-95.

disordered as they advanced into a swamp. In Cooke's absence, Heth's remaining brigades temporarily drove the Federals from their new defenses before being compelled to fall back due to a lack of support on their right. General Heth described the situation in his official report: "The attack was made handsomely and in my judgment would have proved eminently successful had it been followed up by the troops on my right." By nightfall, the soldiers of Cooke's Brigade, now holding the extreme left of the Army of Northern Virginia, re-located their comrades in the division along Shady Grove Church Road, where they began throwing up a new breastwork of logs and earth. Captain Sloan remembered: "As soon as we were halted we began to fortify, and by early dawn had constructed good temporary works." As June 2 came to an end, the exhausted officers and men of the regiment continued working on their entrenchments and wondered if they would see further action the next day.<sup>546</sup>

At 4:30 a.m., elements of three Union corps surged forward in a disjointed attack at Cold Harbor. Despite overwhelming numbers, the attackers quickly became confused by the terrain and the assault columns fractured by misunderstood orders and uncooperative commanders. In addition, the twenty-four hour respite allowed the Confederate defenders on this part of the field to turn their formerly crude earthworks into a formidable position, not likely to be breached even by a well coordinated assault let alone the disjointed charges witnessed on the morning of June 3. In one place only did the Federals break through, and that success was only temporary. Elsewhere, the attackers suffered heavy casualties and the advance ground to a halt within minutes.

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<sup>546</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 708-709; Rhea, *Cold Harbor*, 295-307; Hess, 228-30; Sloan, 96.

Within one hour the assault was over. The Confederate defenses were simply too strong to attack successfully, especially by troops exhausted and demoralized by nearly a month of hard fighting. Union losses among the three corps that conducted the main assault numbered nearly 4,500 men compared with fewer than 1,000 Confederate casualties. While his main attack had failed, Grant looked for further action on other parts of the line, namely in Warren and Burnside's sectors on the northern fringes of the battlefield. Beginning at around 7:00 a.m., the Ninth Corps, facing north from the vicinity of Bethesda Church, began a series of attacks against Heth's entrenched line along Shady Grove Church Road.<sup>547</sup>

The situation facing Brigadier General Cooke's Brigade, on the left of Heth's line, was far from enviable. Despite good cover provided by a strong line of earthworks, the terrain in front of the brigade left much to be desired. After the war, James Graham wrote: "On our front was a wooded valley which enable the enemy to approach unharmed very closely." Meanwhile Captain John Sloan of Company B commented, "Owing to the dense, heavy body of woods the enemy were enabled to make near approaches in our front, and previous to their advance we could hear distinctly the orders given by their officers." Following a lively bout of skirmishing earlier in the morning, at around 8 o'clock, elements of Brigadier General Robert Potter's Division moved forward through the trees toward Cooke's line. Despite the cover afforded by the woods, the Federal attackers were never able to mount a successful charge against the Confederate works. Lieutenant Graham explained: "We could hear the officers giving their orders to advance,

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<sup>547</sup> Rhea, *Cold Harbor*, 318-70.

we were always ready for them, and they were never able to get well started before we stopped them with a withering fire, though many attempts were made at sharpshooting.” According to Captain Sloan, “Brigade after brigade was hurled against us, until the ground in our front was literally covered with their dead and wounded. Their assaults were repulsed along the whole line.” Unable to breach the Confederate works, the attacking New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians took cover and began throwing up their own temporary breastworks and rifle pits.<sup>548</sup>

For the remainder of the morning and into the afternoon, both sides kept up a lively fusillade of musketry fire, using up vast quantities of ammunition. According to James Graham, the enemy “had the protection of the trees and a heavy continuous fire from both sides was maintained far into the evening...I think over two hundred rounds of ammunition per man was fired during the day.” At one point during the fighting, the men’s cartridge boxes began to run empty. Lieutenant Colonel Whitfield quickly called for volunteers to run the gauntlet of fire to the rear and retrieve more ammunition from the wagons. “A sufficient number came forward at once,” recalled Captain Sloan, “and set out on their perilous expedition. In due time they all returned, each bringing a supply of cartridges, but waited some distance back of us for a lull in the firing so as to run the gauntlet of the sharpshooters to the line. Several were badly wounded in making the trip.” The sheer volume of fire put out by the Federal attackers, as attested to by Sloan, caused several casualties within the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina. The most severe

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<sup>548</sup> Sloan, 96; Rhea, *Cold Harbor*, 368-74; Hess, 230-31; James Graham, “Campaign of 1864,” unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880’s or 90’s, found in General John R. Cooke’s Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

loss was Lieutenant Colonel George Whitfield. Encouraging his men from just behind the works, Whitfield was struck in the head by a minie ball, producing a gruesome wound that many feared would prove fatal. As the wounded lieutenant colonel was carried to the rear, Captain William Larkins of Company I, the senior company officer present, only recently returned from the hospital following his own wounding at the Wilderness, took command of the regiment. Second Lieutenant Major Russell now led the company. Miraculously, Whitfield would survive the war although he would never again return to the field.<sup>549</sup>

As the day continued, the list of casualties continued to lengthen. Captain Sloan described the death of one of his men: "Private [William J.] Hunt<sup>550</sup>, when shot, was standing next to me. We were trying to locate a sharpshooter in our front, who had become very troublesome by the accuracy of his aim. We had been exposed in our position but a few moments, when a minnie-ball pierced his head, scattering his brains in my face, and he sunk down lifeless at my feet." With much of the soldiers' bodies protected by the cover of the earthworks, most of regiment's casualties consisted of head and shoulder wounds. Altogether, the combat on June 3 accounted for at least twelve casualties within the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina. Included in this total was one man killed, Private Hunt, as well as eleven wounded, two of whom later died of their wounds.

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<sup>549</sup> James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Sloan, 96-98; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, Petersburg, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, August 7, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>550</sup> Private William J. Hunt was the brother of Assistant Surgeon Leander Gwynn Hunt, whose letters were heavily quoted earlier in the regiment's history.

By the end of the day, Cooke's Brigade, the main focal point of Potter's attack, had suffered more than 100 casualties. Particularly hard hit was the Forty-Eighth North Carolina, which held the left flank of the brigade and was therefore subjected to a severe enfilade fire for much of the day. It is believed that Burnside's failed offensive, which was largely confined to Cooke's front, resulted in upwards of 800 Union casualties. Finally, several hours after darkness settled over the battlefield, the firing largely died down with both sides exhausted and content to let the enemy alone for the time being. The Ninth Corps' efforts to breach Heth's line had failed miserably, as had every other Union effort of the day. General Heth, well pleased with the performance of his division during the day's action, took special notice of Cooke's Brigade in his official report:

On June 3 my division remained behind breastworks hastily constructed on a line no less hastily taken up. The enemy on June 3 commenced an attack on my lines at early dawn, their efforts being confined principally to Cooke's front, whose lines, from the accidents of ground, afforded them every chance of success, but this gallant brigade held its own under most disadvantages circumstances, repelling each attack and, it is believed, punishing the enemy severely. The skirmishing along the entire line during the day amounted almost to a battle.<sup>551</sup>

As the firing died down along the lines, the soldiers of the Twenty-Seventh, their lips encrusted with black powder and their limbs exhausted and sore from the day's continuous action, sank to the ground and tried to rest. The men were given little time to relax. Sometime around 3:00 a.m., Heth, under orders from Generals Hill and Lee, began quietly withdrawing his division from its earthworks in preparation for a night march to the south, down the Confederate lines towards the far right. Given the pressure on his

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<sup>551</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 709; Sloan, 97-98; Hess, 230-31; Rhea, *Cold Harbor*, 368-82; James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Jordan and Manarin, 6-98.

Cold Harbor lines that morning, Lee believed Grant might try to attack again in that sector and so sought additional forces to be held in reserve. Uniting Heth's Division with the rest of Hill's Third Corps, already in reserve behind Hoke and Breckinridge's positions, was simply the most logical way of reinforcing the right. Orders also went out to Jubal Early to pull his Second Corps back slightly in order to better secure the Army of Northern Virginia's left from any further attack in that quarter. After marching for most of the day along dusty and congested roads in the rear of the army, the troops were halted and allowed to rest for the evening. This halt continued into June 5, as the men relaxed, slept and cooked what rations came to hand. That night, however, this period of rest came to an end. About 11:00 p.m., Heth moved his brigades further to the right where they were quickly shuffled into a new reserve line behind Mahone's Division and ordered to entrench once again.<sup>552</sup>

Held in reserve for the next two days, the men of Cooke's Brigade, entrenched about one mile south of Gaines' Farm, were given a great boost in health and morale with the sudden issue of excellent rations. Due to the army's proximity to Richmond, large quantities of meat, bread and even coffee were made available to the Confederate soldiers, a vast change from the scanty and poor quality rations of the previous months. Writing to his mother around this time, Private Samuel Lockhart described the men's current food situation: "Well, Mother, we are getting first rate rations now. We get a half-pound of meat per day, plenty of bread, coffee, and sugar, and sometimes rice and

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<sup>552</sup> Ernest B. Furgurson, *Not War But Murder: Cold Harbor, 1864*, (New York: Vintage Civil War Library, 2000), 185, 207; Hess, 231; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, in line of battle near Gaines' Farm, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, June 8, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 709.

peas and onions, etc. Our Company is getting along very well.” Likewise impressed with the improved rations, Lieutenant Strayhorn commented, “The army is living better now that at any time in my knowledge since the war commenced.” In addition to better food, the size of individual companies as well as the regiment as a whole was slightly increased during the soldiers’ stay at Cold Harbor. In another letter home, Strayhorn wrote that Company G now had “26 men and all of them well.” The reason for this slight boost in numbers revolved around the return of numerous wounded and sick officers and men from Confederate hospitals during late May and early June. For example, many of the wounded from the Wilderness, sufficiently recovered for field service, returned to the regiment and the brigade during this time.<sup>553</sup>

On the night of June 7, Heth’s Division quietly moved to the front lines and relieved Hoke’s Division, which had maintained its forward positions at Cold Harbor for nearly a week. In describing the regiment’s movement, Lieutenant Strayhorn wrote:

Last night after dark our division moved to the front line after being held in reserve for several days... While we were nearing the front line several Yankee bands along the line discoursed some of the sweetest music I ever heard and this morning when it was light enough for us to see we discovered the yankees front line immediately in our front only to be about 100 yards off with several beautiful flags unfurled to the breeze.

The proximity of the Federal lines was soon felt in the form of sharpshooters’ bullets and occasional artillery shells striking the entrenchments, behind which the Twenty-Seventh

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<sup>553</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Gaines’ Farm, Virginia, to Emeline and Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, June 9, 1864, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, Gaines’ Farm, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, June 8 and 12, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; David Thompson, Hospital in Liberty, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, June 3, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

and its sister regiments huddled for protection. In describing the situation, Captain Sloan commented, “We remained here in line of battle, under constant fire; happily, our immediate command had no serious casualties.”<sup>554</sup>

Despite the presence of the enemy and the danger of poking one’s head above the earthen parapet, even for a second, the men were confident of holding their works, which were continually strengthened, against any further enemy attack. Private Lockhart described the defenses for his mother and sister: “We have three lines of troops at this point... The front line runs around the bow of a hill and we have got a ditch cut about four feet deep, through the hill in our rear to get out to get water in time of an engagement... I think the Yankees are going to make a desperate struggle to break our lines at this place, but if they don’t mind they will have to bite [the dust] if they charge our ranks at this point.” In much the same vein, Lieutenant Strayhorn commented, “Our position is a very strong one and our boys confident... we are [also] supported by three strong lines in our rear.” Summing up his men’s activity at Cold Harbor during the division’s stint in the forward lines, General Heth simply stated, “My division remained most of the time in the trenches, cheerfully doing its duty.”<sup>555</sup>

Following three nights and three days of continuous duty in the front lines, the men of Heth’s Division were withdrawn back into the second line of earthworks. Here,

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<sup>554</sup> Sloan, 98; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, Gaines’ Farm, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, June 8, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>555</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Gaines’ Farm, Virginia, to Emeline and Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, June 9, 1864, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, Gaines’ Farm, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, June 8, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VI*, 709.

according to Second Lieutenant Strayhorn of Company G, the men could “breath a little more freely and [are] not quite so much exposed to the bullets of the sharpshooters.”

During the regiment’s stay in the front line, momentous events had transpired within the Army of Northern Virginia. Following a renewed threat to the Shenandoah Valley and the vital railroad town of Lynchburg by Union General David Hunter, Lee had ordered John C. Breckinridge’s command, only recently transferred to his army following the Battle of New Market, to return to the Valley on June 7. Later that week, Jubal Early’s Second Corps, as well as two Confederate cavalry divisions commanded by Major General Wade Hampton, were also dispatched from the trenches of Cold Harbor to secure the Valley and stop Sheridan’s Union cavalry from destroying the tracks of the Virginia Central Railroad northwest of Richmond. Lee also hoped that Early’s presence in the Valley might result in the recall of thousands of Union troops from his front to fight in the Shenandoah. These transfers reduced the army to only two infantry corps and two brigades of cavalry. Lee was gambling that Grant’s current defensive posture would hold and that the heavy losses inflicted on the Army of the Potomac during the past month would keep the enemy from initiating another major offensive push for the time being. Indeed, since the June 3 assault, Grant’s troops, relegated to shortening their lines into a more defensive posture and constructing strong earthworks of their own, had shown no inclination to attack again. According to Lieutenant Strayhorn, “the enemy are massing their troops and throwing up very strong works immediately in our front which looks very much like preparations for as siege as they have made no attacks.”<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>556</sup> Furgurson, *Not War But Murder*, 206-25; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, Gaines’ Farm, Virginia, to his

The relative inactivity witnessed by both armies during their second week at Cold Harbor had much to do with the heavy losses suffered through the previous month's campaign. Since the crossing of the Rapidan on May 4, the Army of the Potomac had suffered more than 50,000 casualties. Despite substantial reinforcements from Butler's Army of the James as well as the defenses of Washington, Grant could muster fewer than 100,000 men by the second week in June, and many of them, exhausted and shell-shocked, could no longer be considered "effective" soldiers. The Army of Northern Virginia had also suffered horrendous losses thus far in the campaign, gutting Lee's strength and thereby surrendering the initiative to Grant's larger force. Since May 5, Lee had lost nearly 30,000 men, roughly half of his army. Included in this total were irreplaceable officers at almost every level of command. Like Grant, he had been reinforced several times during the campaign, particularly by Breckinridge's small command as well as Pickett and Hoke's divisions. Now, however, with Early and Breckinridge transferred to the Valley and Hoke's Division soon to rejoin P.G.T. Beauregard's forces at Bermuda Hundred, Lee possessed barely 40,000 men with which to protect Richmond and keep tabs on Grant's disposition, which, given the lessons of the previous month, could change at any time.<sup>557</sup>

In conjunction with the rest of the army, Cooke's Brigade had likewise suffered extremely heavy casualties from the Wilderness to Cold Harbor. Starting the campaign with over 1,800 troops, the brigade had lost nearly two-thirds of its initial strength by the

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sister, Orange County, North Carolina, June 12, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>557</sup> Rhea, *Cold Harbor*, 392-93; Furgurson, 243-56; J. Tracy Power, *Lee's Miserables: Life in the Army of Northern Virginia from the Wilderness to Appomattox*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1998), 78-81.

second week of June. The Twenty-Seventh North Carolina accounted for many of these losses. Between May 5 and June 12, the regiment suffered at least 221 casualties, including nineteen killed, 197 wounded, eighteen of them mortally, and five captured. Many of these casualties were the result of unspecified or unrecorded skirmishes, which took men from the ranks as easily as a great battle such as the Wilderness. Overall, the regiment lost over half of its May 4 roster during the so-called "Overland Campaign." At the command level, both field commanders had been severely wounded and numerous company level officers had likewise been lost to wounds, not to mention the high rate of turnover among the non-commissioned officers in each company. In addition, the daily regimen of marching, digging and fighting had exacted a heavy toll from the remaining troops' endurance and health. During the second week of June, a severe outbreak of diarrhea within the ranks further sapped the strength of the regiment and made life even more miserable for the soldiers. In commenting on the situation, Lieutenant Strayhorn wrote: "I am quite unwell and have been for some time, I am almost worn out with this campaign. Since it commenced which has been nearly 11/2 months our brigade has been in line of battle every night except three. We have twenty-six men in the company now and every one of them are sick with diarrhea." Despite the casualties and the continually worsening condition of the officers and men, the Twenty-Seventh, as well as its sister regiments in Cooke's Brigade, remained in relatively good spirits and ready for further marching orders. The ongoing issue of good rations and even real coffee may have had something to do with this.<sup>558</sup>

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<sup>558</sup> Clark, 446; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, Gaines' Farm, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North

Unable to breach Lee's impregnable defenses at Cold Harbor, Grant once again set about maneuvering his army around the Confederate right flank. Realizing that in order to defeat the Army of Northern Virginia he must first cut off its lines of supply, Grant now planned for the Army of the Potomac to cross the James River southeast of Richmond, join forces with elements of Butler's army, and seize the vitally important Confederate railroad hub of Petersburg. With Petersburg captured and Lee's railroad lifelines to the rest of the Confederacy cut off, Federal forces, amply supplied by the Union navy, would be able to move on Richmond from south, putting Lee in an impossible situation and at least guaranteeing the capture of the Confederate capital, if not the complete destruction of Lee's army. Preparations for this movement began on June 12. Late that evening Grant's troops began quietly vacating their earthworks at Cold Harbor and shifting south towards the James. As a diversionary measure, Grant and Meade ordered Gouverneur Warren's Fifth Corps to cross the Chickahominy River and take up a defensive position near White Oak Swamp. This force would hopefully convince Lee that the Army of the Potomac remained north of the river and still constituted a serious threat to Richmond, thereby preventing Confederate reinforcements from reaching Beauregard's troops defending Bermuda Hundred and Petersburg.<sup>559</sup>

On the morning of June 13, the Confederates at Cold Harbor slowly probed forward and soon discovered the absence of the enemy to their front. The entire Army of the Potomac had slipped away during the night. Unsure whether Grant meant to cross the

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Carolina, June 12, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

<sup>559</sup> Furgurson, 220-49; Sloan, 99; Noah Andre Trudeau, *The Last Citadel: Petersburg, Virginia, June 1864-April 1865*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 3-18.

James or look for another opportunity against Richmond, Lee moved his army south to cover the approaches to the Confederate capital while feeling for the enemy along the line of the Chickahominy River. Along with the rest of the Army of Northern Virginia, Heth's Division marched south, crossed the Chickahominy and took up positions near Riddell's Shop, perhaps twelve miles southeast of Richmond. General Heth reported: "The division remained in the trenches at Cold Harbor until June 13 when, leaving that point, [it] moved to and formed a line of battle where the Charles City and Long Bridge Road crosses White Oak Swamp." In this position, the men of the Twenty-Seventh dug in and passed a relatively quiet time until the morning of the fifteenth.<sup>560</sup>

While Lee's forces took up a new line near White Oak Swamp, Grant's army was still on the move. By the evening of June 14, most of the Army of the Potomac was in position along the banks of the James, preparing to cross the river via a 2,200-foot pontoon bridge at Wyanoke Neck, several miles south of Charles City Court House, and cooperate with Butler's army to seize Petersburg. Meanwhile, Warren's Fifth Corps had crossed the Chickahominy and drawn up in battle order to the front of Hill and Anderson's corps. Despite some minor skirmishing between opposing cavalry details, the two sides remained relatively inactive for the time being. On the morning of the fifteenth, as Grant's thousands crossed the river and began their movement on Petersburg, Heth's troops detected an enemy thrust up the Charles City Road from the direction of the Chickahominy. This force was made up of elements of James Wilson's Cavalry Division and constituted only a Union probing action, designed to keep Lee guessing as

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<sup>560</sup> Trudeau, *The Last Citadel*, 19-22; Furgurson, 248-50; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 330; Dowdey, 782.

to Grant's intentions. Bumping up against Confederate cavalry, Wilson's troopers pushed forward and nearly routed the Southern horsemen. Seeing this development to his front, General Heth called on Cooke's Brigade to drive the enemy off and restore the advanced lines previously occupied by the cavalry. In his report on the operation, Heth recalled: "On June 15, information was received that the enemy was attacking up the Charles City Road. Brigadier General [John Rogers] Cooke was ordered to drive them back and occupy the Gary House on the Charles City Road, some three miles from Riddell's Shop, where the principal portion of the Third Corps was in line."<sup>561</sup>

Although the ensuing engagement was of minor importance, its severity was long remembered by the officers and men of the regiment. "We came across a large force of cavalry at Gary's Farm," Captain John Sloan recalled. "They had met a small force of our cavalry and had been driving them. When we arrived they dismounted and sent their horses to the rear, formed their lines and showed fight." Lieutenant Strayhorn, still in temporary command of Company G, described the skirmish in a letter to his sister: "We moved forward in line of battle with some few dismounted cavalry as sharpshooters, the sharpshooters of our brigade was thrown out with them and suffered severely. Our brigade was the only one engaged except the cavalry, which consisted of very little force, sometimes our line of battle walking over the top of them." Following a sharp exchange of fire, made all the more intense by the enemy's use of seven shot repeating Spencer carbines, Cooke's Brigade managed to drive the enemy off and capture the Gary House. General Heth's report praised the brigade's actions: "Cooke at once attacked and, after a

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<sup>561</sup> Sloan, 99-100; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 330; Trudeau, 22-25.

most trying fight, losing some valuable men, succeeded in carrying out his orders. General Cooke and his brigade deserve my thanks for their conduct on this occasion.” In accomplishing their mission, Cooke’s troops had suffered heavily, considering this was but a minor skirmish. Although the brigade’s losses are unknown, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina alone suffered sixteen casualties, including two killed and fourteen wounded, four of whom would later die of their wounds. Company G was particularly hard hit, losing seven men, four of whom were killed or mortally wounded in this supposedly minor affair. The highest-ranking casualty was First Lieutenant Kenneth Rayner Jones of Company I. Severely wounded in the left leg, the avid diarist was sent home to recover. Despite being promoted to captain in early August, Jones would never again take the field. He was captured in Raleigh in April 1865. The skirmish at Gary’s Farm showed that even a small engagement could take men from the ranks just as easily as a great battle.<sup>562</sup>

While Cooke’s troops battled it out with Union cavalry north of the James, the main Federal effort against Petersburg came close to capturing the important rail center. Throughout June 15, Union soldiers converged on Petersburg from the east. Following a lengthy delaying action at Baylor’s Farm, the heavily outnumbered Confederate defenders fell back into the strong earthworks that ringed the city. By evening, the lead elements of the twin Union armies, under Generals William Smith and Winfield Hancock respectively, had breached the defenses and driven the Confederates back towards

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<sup>562</sup> Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, near Long Pole Bridge, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, June 15, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Sloan, 100; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 330; Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

Petersburg. At this critical moment, however, caution and exhaustion sapped the will of the Federal commanders to continue the attack. Despite holding on to the outer works, Union troops failed to capture the city, thereby allowing Confederate reinforcements under Beauregard, including Hoke's Division, to form a new defensive line several hundred yards to the west. Despite the heavy attacks against Petersburg during the day, Lee remained concerned that Grant might still try to attack Richmond directly. Therefore, other than dispatching Hoke's Division to Petersburg's relief, the Confederate commander maintained his lines behind the Chickahominy, waiting for assurances that Grant's entire force had crossed the James. Meanwhile, Cooke's men recovered from the day's action and assisted the rest of Heth's Division in strengthening their defensive line at White Oak Swamp Bridge. The remainder of the Army of Northern Virginia remained in its positions along the Charles City and Long Bridge roads near the hamlet of Riddell's Shop.<sup>563</sup>

Throughout the next three days, it became apparent to Lee that Beauregard was indeed facing Grant's entire army at Petersburg. On June 16 and 17, Federal commanders pushed their troops forward in a series of disjointed attacks against Beauregard's new line along Harrison's Creek. Despite heavy casualties to both sides, the attackers were unable to crack the stubborn Confederate defense. By the evening of the seventeenth, Lee fully comprehended the threat to Petersburg and no longer believed that Grant intended a simultaneous assault on Richmond. Indeed, during this time, Warren's diversionary force, slowly working its way to the James, had disappeared

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<sup>563</sup> Trudeau, 24-44; Dowdey, 782.

entirely from Hill's front. By the morning of June 18, as Beauregard withdrew to yet another reserve line closer to the city, most of the Army of Northern Virginia had either arrived at Petersburg or was on its way to the beleaguered city.<sup>564</sup>

For the officers and men of Cooke's Brigade, still holding their positions in the Chickahominy bottomlands, the move to Petersburg began on the evening of the seventeenth. In company with the rest of Heth's Division, the brigade left its earthworks near White Oak Swamp Bridge and marched a short distance to White Tavern, possibly also known as White Cross; here they bivouacked for the night. Starting out early the next morning, the Twenty-Seventh and its sister regiments proceeded in the direction of Richmond before diverging to Drewry's Bluff, where they managed to cross the James on a pontoon bridge. Once across the river, the marching column struck the Richmond and Petersburg Turnpike and headed south for at least eight miles before boarding the cars of the Richmond and Petersburg Railroad for a ride of another five miles. Finally, late in the afternoon, the regiment dismounted from the slow moving cars and marched the remaining mile or two to Fort Clifton, located on the north bank of the Appomattox River roughly two miles below Petersburg. Altogether, the men had covered more than twenty miles on foot and another five by train during the course of the day's movement. This mileage in itself was nothing new to veteran soldiers, but, as related by several eyewitnesses, this day's march, made worse by severe heat and dusty roads, turned into a horrendous experience for everyone involved. Lieutenant Thomas Strayhorn, himself afflicted with a pair of nearly worn out boots, described the march: "I came very near

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<sup>564</sup> Trudeau, 24, 44-55.

giving up yesterday. We made the hardest days march that I have done since the war commenced. I saw more straggling in our division than I ever saw before, the roads were so dusty and filled with broken down men for miles.” In a similar vein, one of Strayhorn’s men, Private Samuel Lockhart, recalled: “We had a hard march yesterday, from White Tavern to this place. We marched upwards of twenty miles. The most of the men were completely broken down. When the Brigade went in camp we only had six men [in the company]. The roads are very dusty, and it is the worst marching I ever saw; you couldn’t hardly see a man fifty yards from you at some places.”<sup>565</sup>

While Cooke’s Brigade was on the march, the final Federal assault on Petersburg was repulsed at every turn by Beauregard’s defenders, reinforced by the lead elements of the Army of Northern Virginia. From June 15-18, Grant had lost another 10,000 men in trying to capture the important city, which might have fallen with one more determined attack on the evening of the fifteenth. Rebuffed in his frontal assaults, Grant now set about laying siege to Petersburg. By slowly cutting off each of the city’s rail and road lifelines, the Union commander hoped to envelope the defenders and starve them out of their trenches. Given the Union army’s failures thus far in the campaign, many Confederates were confident that Petersburg could not be taken. Writing to his sister, Lieutenant Strayhorn wrote: “The Yankees haven’t got Petersburg and I don’t think they ever can take it, but from what I can hear they are near enough to shell and burn the place which I have no doubt they will do if we can’t drive them further off.” Once again,

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<sup>565</sup> Hess, 234; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, near Petersburg, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, June 19, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Samuel P. Lockhart, below Petersburg, Virginia, to Emeline Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, June 19, 1864, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

Private Lockhart echoed the reasoning of his commanding officer: “The Yankees will not be so forward now, since Mr. Lee’s army has come over this side of the James. I think Grant is completely lost...I hope he will soon see the folly in trying to take Richmond and quit fighting and let us alone, so we can rest.”<sup>566</sup>

Following the previous day’s march and the nearly constant marching and fighting of the previous month and a half, the regiment did indeed require a period of rest. From their new position near Fort Clifton, the men of Heth’s Division remained in reserve about halfway between Petersburg and the Confederate lines across the Bermuda Hundred peninsula, ready to respond to either location in the event of a renewed Union attack. Throughout June 19, Cooke’s men recovered from their recent movements and prepared to go into position between the Appomattox River and Swift Creek. In a letter to his mother, Samuel Lockhart described the situation: “We are lying in the woods this afternoon, resting; we will go into position tonight, in an open sandy field; we are all [sun] burnt as black as negroes.” Unfortunately, this short period of rest was soon brought to an abrupt end. On the nineteenth, Federal engineers began laying a pontoon bridge across the James near Deep Bottom. This development, combined with renewed Union cavalry operations on the Peninsula, caused Southern leaders to once again concern themselves with the security of the capital. With nearly all available Confederate troops in position near Petersburg and Bermuda Hundred, Heth’s Division, temporarily in reserve on a quiet part of the line, was the obvious choice to provide security for

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<sup>566</sup> Trudeau, 52-60; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, near Petersburg, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, June 19, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Samuel P. Lockhart, below Petersburg, Virginia, to Emeline Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, June 19, 1864, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

Richmond. On the morning of the twentieth, two of Heth's brigades under Cooke and Davis were ordered to report to the north side of the James. Retracing their route of two days prior, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh arrived at their assigned position, between Chaffin's Bluff and Deep Bottom, sometime that evening.<sup>567</sup>

The next day, the troops were called upon to assist a force of Confederate cavalry against their Union opponents somewhere near Deep Bottom at a place called Yellow Tavern.<sup>568</sup> The developing situation that confronted Cooke's Brigade was very similar to the engagement at Gary's Farm a week previous. Captain Sloan recalled: "Our cavalry was routed by the enemy at Yellow Tavern, and our brigade was ordered to their support. When we reached there, we found them slowly retiring before the enemy in a dense woods. Gen. Cooke at once ordered forward his sharpshooters, and very soon a spirited fight began. Our regiment was thrown into line and we began to press them back." For a time, the brigade's sharpshooters and the Twenty-Seventh's battle line slowly pushed the Federals further back into the woods. Frustrated and loath to retire, the Union cavalrymen, according to one officer, "set the woods on fire, so that we had to advance through dense smoke, burning leaves and brush." "The [enemy] held their ground so stubbornly that Gen. Cooke ordered the whole brigade into line, with orders to advance at a run and with yells." Faced with an entire Confederate infantry brigade, the Federals

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<sup>567</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, below Petersburg, Virginia, to Emeline Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, June 19, 1864, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, north side of James River, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, June 23, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Trudeau, 56-64.

<sup>568</sup> This Yellow Tavern should not be confused with the more famous Yellow Tavern located north of Richmond which saw a major cavalry battle on May 12, 1864 as well as the death of Confederate General J.E.B. Stuart at the hands of Phillip Sheridan's Union cavalry.

quickly fled from their positions, abandoning their wounded as well as several Henry repeating rifles. The small skirmish resulted in few casualties to either side. Within the Twenty-Seventh, one man, Private Simon Sexton of Company F, was killed and no one was seriously wounded. Aside from slight losses, however, the skirmish had been a terrible experience for Cooke's soldiers. Forced to advance through the burning woods in the heat of the day, "the men experienced great thirst, and many were scorched by the fires; in some instances the cartridges were exploded in their boxes." Following the day's action, the troops withdrew back to their original position several miles west of Deep Bottom and bivouacked for the night.<sup>569</sup>

For the rest of June, Cooke's Brigade remained in its positions near Deep Bottom, watching and waiting for any movement towards Richmond by elements of the Army of the James, which crossed the river from Bermuda Hundred on June 25. During the regiment's stay on the Peninsula, which coincided with what Private Lockhart believed was "the hottest weather I think I ever felt," the officers and men busied themselves with continuing picket duty and the construction of strong earthworks. In describing their current location to his sister, Lieutenant Strayhorn wrote: "We are now on the North side of the James and about half way between Drewry's Bluff and the deep bottom, our lines running nearly parallel with and some two or three miles from the river." Private Lockhart went into slightly more detail about the regiment's position when, on June 26, he stated: "We are in a very thick piece of woods... We have been here for the past three

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<sup>569</sup> Sloan, 100-101; James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 330.

or four days...our Brigade is deployed out, two steps apart, and are watching the movements of the enemy. We have got good breast works.” While deployed in this position, Cooke’s troops were not directly engaged with Butler’s forces, which refused to venture out from behind their strong earthworks at Deep Bottom, but did participate in reconnoitering missions and came under intermittent fire from both Union artillery and naval gunboats. Despite the occasional intensity of the bombardment, however, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, protected by thick woods and strong breastworks, suffered few if any additional casualties during their stay north of the James.<sup>570</sup>

While Cooke’s Brigade skirmished and entrenched near Deep Bottom, Grant’s policy of enveloping Petersburg continued. On June 22, the Union Second Corps attacked to the south of the city in the hopes of outflanking the defenders and severing the Jerusalem Plank Road. Following a severe fight, William Mahone and Camdus Wilcox’s divisions launched a fierce counterattack, shattering the Federal assault, taking nearly 1,700 prisoners, and throwing the enemy back to their start positions. The Confederate victory, although shocking to Union commanders, only temporarily delayed the inevitable severing of the Jerusalem Road to Southern supplies. Like spokes on a wagon wheel, supply lines, both road and rail, radiated outward from Petersburg. The next logical Union target would be the Petersburg and Weldon Railroad, only a few miles to the west of the now cut off Jerusalem Road. In order to defend his supply lines properly,

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<sup>570</sup> Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, north side of James River, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, June 23, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Samuel P. Lockhart, below Chafin’s Bluff, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, June 26, 1864, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 330; Sloan, 101.

Lee needed more troops south of Petersburg. The two brigades of Heth's Division that had remained near the city had already been transferred to the south and were even now helping to defend the rail line. It was only logical that the division's other two brigades, under Cooke and Davis, idly observing a small Union force north of the James, be sent to join them.<sup>571</sup>

On July 3, under orders from General Lee, Cooke's troops were relieved by Lane's Brigade of Wilcox's Division and withdrawn from their lines near Deep Bottom. Retracing the now well-known route across the James and south to Petersburg, the soldiers of the Twenty-Seventh arrived immediately south of the city that evening and went into position behind strong earthworks about one mile east of the Weldon Railroad, somewhere to the right of Rives' Salient.<sup>572</sup> The regiment's position was far from enviable. According to Private Samuel Lockhart, "We have a very hot and dusty place; we are [entrenched] in an open field; have no shade; only what we make with blankets, bushes, etc." As a result of these terrible conditions, the officers and men remained dirty, sun burnt, and generally rough in appearance. In another letter home, Lockhart told his sister, "If you were to see our company all together, you would say they were the toughest looking set of men you ever saw in your life; I think the girls would most

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<sup>571</sup> Trudeau, 56-90; Hess, 234-36.

<sup>572</sup> The earthworks ringing Petersburg were far larger and stronger than the temporary breastworks constructed on a daily basis by the troops of both armies during the Overland Campaign. Confederate engineers, assisted by soldier and slave labor, had constructed most of the city's defenses over a period of several years. The defenses consisted of a main line of battery positions linked together by an infantry parapet fronted by a deep ditch; as the siege continued the troops added to this line with a line of rifle pits or shallow trenches to the front and reserve earthworks and bomb proofs to the rear, all connected by covered ways or protective ravines. Most of the additional earthworks constructed south and west of Petersburg during the ten-month siege were very similar in both design and appearance, although they may have been erected much more quickly by fast-working Confederate soldiers, such as the men of Cooke's Brigade.

disown their sweethearts if they could see them now...you would hardly know me if you were to see me; I am sunburned as brown as any "Mulatto" you ever saw." In addition, water and firewood, two of the most important commodities for any army, were in short supply around Petersburg. In describing the situation, Lieutenant Strayhorn commented, "We are lying here in the trenches in the middle of a large cornfield and the most of us nothing to keep the hot sun off except our blankets that we spread on forks and the wood and water we use we have to carry a considerable distance." Despite these conditions, most soldiers remained determined and in relatively good spirits, boosted in part by receiving at least some of their back pay during mid-July. In the same letter quoted above, Thomas Strayhorn told his sister: "All this I am willing to submit to to keep the yankees out of North Carolina."<sup>573</sup>

The uncomfortable nature of the trenches was somewhat compensated for by the brigade's distance from enemy lines. Following the Army of the Potomac's defeat at the Jerusalem Plank Road in late June, Grant's forces extended their siege lines to the south of Petersburg and contented themselves with improving their earthworks and batteries and organizing a massive supply base at City Point, located at the confluence of the James and Appomattox rivers. This relative lack of activity on the Federal side allowed the Confederates some respite from the constant fighting of the previous months,

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<sup>573</sup> Samuel P. Lockhart, Petersburg, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, July 9 and 18, 1864, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, two miles south of Petersburg, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, July 12 and 16, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Morrison, *Memoirs of Henry Heth*, 189; Sloan, 101; David Thompson, in line of battle near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, July 17, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

although Union artillery and sharpshooters continued to plague the front line troops huddled in their trenches and rifle pits. According to Lieutenant Strayhorn, “The enemy in front of the works of our Division are some 1 1/2 or 2 miles off, our Brigade has been in no engagement [recently] but have been under the enemy’s shelling several times.” Other than occasional picket duty in the forward rifle pits, the soldiers of the regiment had little to occupy their time other than improving their earthworks, writing letters home, as well as cooking and eating their rations, which were once again declining in both quantity and quality. Only recently returned from a Bedford County hospital, Private David Thompson of Company G stated: “We do nothing but lay here in the fortifications and cook and eat, the yankees in our front are about one mile off [and] we have pickets between us.” In describing the issue of rations and the result of food shortages, Private Lockhart commented: “We don’t get anything to eat but bread and meat and coffee; just one thing all the time. The Dr. says that is what makes the men sick so much...I am afraid we are going to have a good deal of sickness this summer.” Faced with a lack of vegetables, many soldiers once again turned to their loved ones at home to supply them with extra food. Particularly popular for were potatoes, onions and beans.<sup>574</sup>

Despite receiving some extra food from home, continuing sickness within the ranks of the regiment and the brigade was indeed a problem during the summer of 1864.

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<sup>574</sup> David Thompson, in line of battle near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, July 17, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, two miles south of Petersburg, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, July 12, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Trudeau, 56-97; Hess, 238; Samuel P. Lockhart, Petersburg, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, July 18, 1864, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Exposed to the elements and faced with shortages of vegetables and clean drinking water, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh suffered heavily during their first weeks outside of Petersburg. Chronic diarrhea, no doubt caused by poor quality food and water, continued to be a serious problem in several companies. Although relatively few men actually died of disease during this time, many soldiers spent weeks or months recovering in Richmond or Petersburg hospitals. In addition, a few scattered cases of dysentery and even cholera further weakened the strength of the regiment. Captain William Larkins, still temporarily in command of the Twenty-Seventh, suffered from a recurring bout of dysentery during July, while Second Lieutenant Thomas Strayhorn of Company G, himself covering for the sickly Captain Stephen Dickson, possibly endured a slight case of cholera during the continual movements between Richmond and Petersburg. Despite the gradual return of scores of slightly wounded and sick from Confederate hospitals, the strength of the regiment remained below 200 officers and men by mid July. In a letter to his sister, Samuel Lockhart stated: "Our Company is getting very small; we have only fourteen armed men. We have one hundred and ninety in the regiment, and about nine hundred or a thousand in the Brigade; smaller than I ever saw it. I wish we could go in camp so we could recruit up and rest, for I never was as nigh worn out in my life." Despite their low numbers, the men of Cooke's Brigade remained entrenched south of Petersburg and continued to endure, all the while waiting for an enemy attack or orders to march.<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>575</sup> Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, two miles south of Petersburg, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, July 12, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Samuel P. Lockhart, Petersburg, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, July 9, 1864, Hugh Conway

Throughout July, the Union Ninth Corps had been laboring on completing an underground tunnel from their lines east of Petersburg across more than 500 feet of no-man's land to the Confederate bastion known as Elliott's Salient, a battery position supported by the South Carolina brigade of Brigadier General Stephen Elliott. It was the intention of General Ambrose Burnside to pack the end of the tunnel with enough black powder to blow a hole in the otherwise impregnable Confederate defenses, thereby facilitating a breakthrough into Petersburg and an end to the siege. The entire Ninth Corps was assigned to make this assault once the mine was detonated. Wary of the plan, Grant and Meade nevertheless ordered a diversionary movement north of the James to be made by Winfield Hancock's Second Corps, whose troops would hopefully distract Lee into sending a large portion of his army north to confront this threat to Richmond. Hancock's Corps began its movement on the night of July 26-27. The next day Lee learned of the Union move and began making plans to combat it. With only one division of the First Corps currently in position east of Richmond, Lee quickly realized that reinforcements would be needed in order to block Hancock's thrust. The Confederate commander now ordered Kershaw's Division of the First Corps as well as Heth and Wilcox's divisions of the Third Corps to move north and attack the isolated enemy force. These transfers left Petersburg defended by fewer than 20,000 Confederate troops.<sup>576</sup>

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Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

<sup>576</sup> Trudeau, 98-107; Sloan, 102; Dowdey, 826; James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Kennedy, 355.

Heth's Division began its move from Petersburg to the Deep Bottom area around mid-day on July 27. Once again encountering hot and dusty conditions, the soldiers of Cooke's Brigade made relatively slow progress on their march north. Sometime around midnight, the troops crossed the James River via a pontoon bridge near Drewry's Bluff and continued eastward. Following a hard march of more than twenty miles in total, the brigade finally reached its assigned position about dawn on the twenty-eighth and began entrenching from "New Market Hill to a point near B. Aiken's House." By the time Heth's Division reached Deep Bottom, most of the heavy fighting had already taken place the day before. Hancock's troops, assigned but a diversionary movement, did not launch an all out assault against the Confederate lines, while a counterattack by Kershaw and Wilcox's divisions later that afternoon accomplished little. Throughout July 28 and into the coming days, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh continued strengthening their earthworks and participated in several minor skirmishes with enemy pickets in their front. Once again, Union gunboats positioned in the James proved to be the most lethal threat facing the Confederates at Deep Bottom. James Graham wrote: "We were ordered back in haste to [the north side of the James] and were under fire on several occasions, with some loss. On one of these occasions, a single shell killed and wounded seven men of the brigade." Despite the heavy naval bombardment, there were no confirmed casualties within the Twenty-Seventh during the regiment's stay north of the James. On the night of July 28-29, Hancock's troops, having accomplished their mission of diverting large numbers of Confederates from the Petersburg front, began

withdrawing back across the river to Bermuda Hundred and thence to Union lines in front of Petersburg.<sup>577</sup>

At 4:45 a.m. on the morning of July 30, Burnside's mine, packed with nearly four tons of black powder, was exploded underneath Elliott's Salient. Almost instantly, four guns and more than 250 men were blown into the air and a massive crater, measuring 170 feet long, sixty feet wide and thirty feet deep, was created in the Confederate lines. Almost immediately, however, Union plans began to go awry. Instead of bypassing the crater as originally intended, the lead assault troops, buffeted by intense Confederate artillery fire, surged down into the pit and found themselves pinned against its far side. Confederate reinforcements rushed from other sections of the line as more and more Federals crammed themselves into the crater and attempted in vain to push out into the surrounding Confederate trenches. The fighting raged at close quarters until finally, by early afternoon, the last Union troops were driven out of the crater and its adjacent earthworks by a series of fierce Confederate counterattacks. The Ninth Corps' offensive, which had been in the making for nearly a month, had gone down to total defeat. Overall, Federal casualties numbered nearly 4,000 while Confederate losses amounted to roughly 1,500 men, many of them killed or wounded in the initial explosion.<sup>578</sup>

The Army of Northern Virginia gloried in the victory while many of its soldiers commented on the explosion of the mine and Burnside's use of black soldiers, including several regiments of the United States Colored Troops, in the assault. The officers and

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<sup>577</sup> Hess, 238-40; Sloan, 102; Kennedy, 355; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 330; James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>578</sup> Trudeau, 98-127; Kennedy, 355-56.

men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, still entrenched at Deep Bottom, likewise discussed the novel battle amongst themselves and with their loved ones at home. In describing the Battle of the Crater, Captain John Sloan of Company B stated: "Burnside was to explode the "infernal machine" and walk into Petersburg with his colored troops, supposedly unmolested." Sloan proudly went on to say that, "[the enemy] were badly led and, being demoralized, they faltered and sought shelter in the crater. Next came the "nigger" division and the "colored troops fought bravely," until the withering fire from our guns created a perfect carnival of death. Those who witnessed the scene say it was beyond the power of words to describe." Once again, Union attempts to take Petersburg had been thwarted.<sup>579</sup>

On the morning of July 30, with the Union threat to Richmond now at an end and with the Battle of the Crater raging, Lee ordered Heth and Wilcox's divisions to return to their positions within the Petersburg defenses. Leaving their trenches at Deep Bottom at around noon, the men of Heth's Division once again retraced their route of march back across the James and south to Petersburg. In describing this series of movements back and forth between Petersburg and the outskirts of Richmond, General Henry Heth commented, "These marches during the hot summer of 1864, aggravated by dusty roads, were as severe as any I have ever experienced but were made in order and without a murmur." Marching through the streets of Petersburg in the middle of the night, the exhausted men of Cooke's Brigade finally arrived east of the city at around dawn on July

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<sup>579</sup> Sloan, 102-103; James Graham, "Campaign of 1864," unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

31 and were quickly hustled into position within the main defensive line immediately to the right of the crater. Commenting on the regiment's new position, Lieutenant Strayhorn stated: "Our Brigade is about 75 or 100 yards to the right of the place blown up by the yankees...I would rather be a little further from their lines, in my front our works are only about 150 yards apart." Company B of the regiment was apparently positioned even closer to the site of the battle. Captain Sloan commented, "Our company was in line immediately at the crater. In our front, and almost under our noses, lay the bloated, festering bodies of their dead, exposed to the scorching rays of a July sun." In this uncomfortable position, the officers and men of the regiment were destined to remain for the foreseeable future.<sup>580</sup>

In the midst of these movements between Petersburg and Deep Bottom and back, on July 28, the men of the Twenty-Seventh, as well as many of their comrades in other regiments, participated in the North Carolina gubernatorial election. North Carolina's war governor, Zebulon B. Vance, was facing re-election against anti-war candidate and newspaper editor William W. Holden, who hoped to take the state out of the war and negotiate a separate peace with the United States. Many North Carolina soldiers viewed a vote for Holden as a repudiation of everything for which they had been fighting and dying during the past three years. In mid July, Lieutenant Strayhorn joined the discussion about politics when he told his sister: "I don't think [Holden] will get many votes...I don't see how any right thinking or intelligent man can vote for him for as many as do it

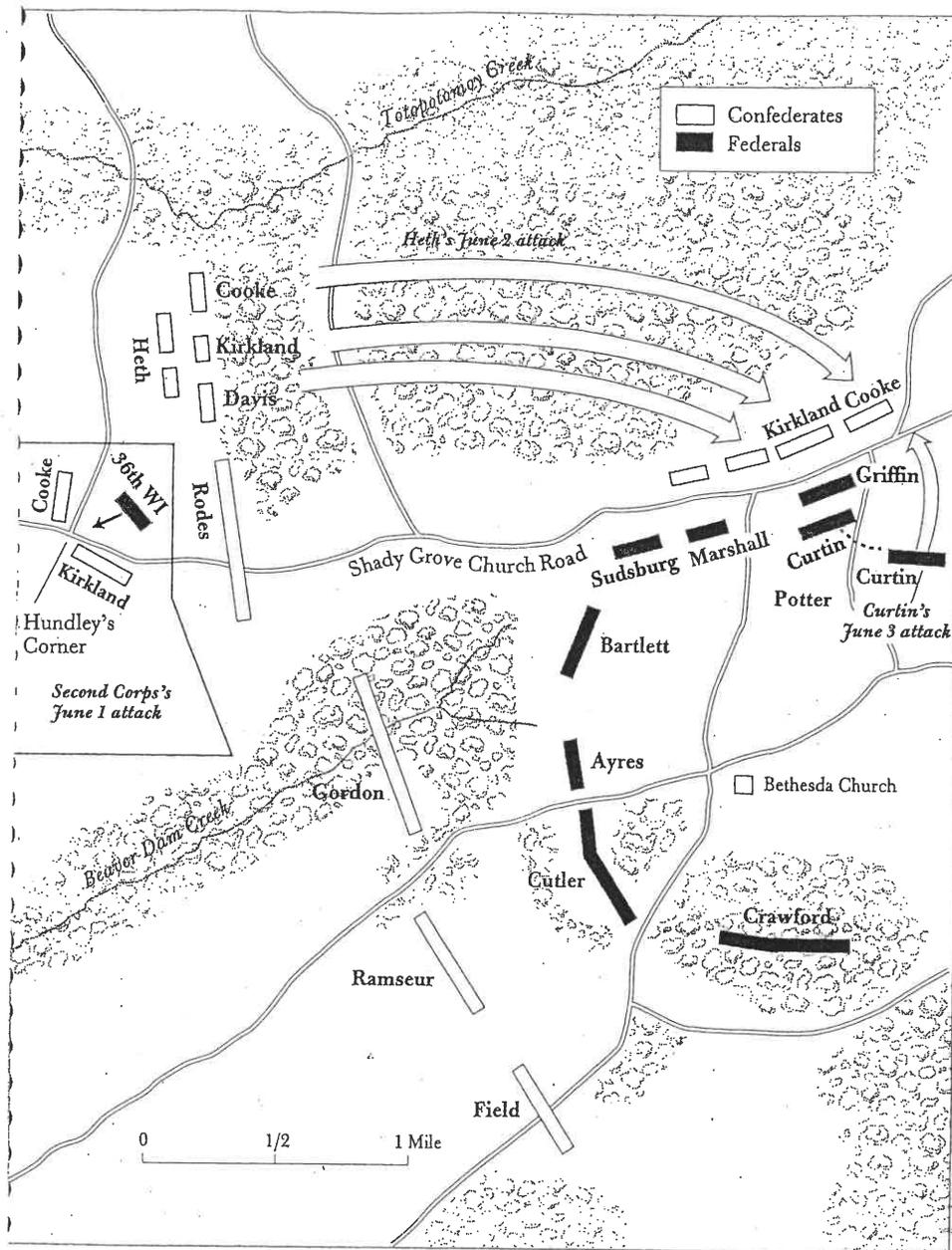
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<sup>580</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR Part I, Vol. VII*, 330; Hess, 240; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, in the trenches east of Petersburg, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, August 7, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

are so many invitations for the yankees to commence war in N. Carolina...I honestly would vote for Abe Lincoln before I would Holden.” Given the final results, Strayhorn need not have worried about a Holden victory. Although the vote totals within the Twenty-Seventh are unknown, of the roughly 15,000 soldier votes counted, fewer than 2,000 went to Holden. On August 4, when the general election was held in North Carolina, Vance easily won reelection with 57,873 ballots versus only 14,432 for Holden. Vance’s victory assured North Carolina’s continued contributions to the Confederacy, both in terms of men and supplies, until Southern independence or total Confederate defeat brought about an end to the conflict. As the month of July came to an end, the exhausted officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, entrenched outside of Petersburg, were left to wonder how much longer the war could possibly last.<sup>581</sup>

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<sup>581</sup> Barrett, 242; Hess, 239-40; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, two miles south of Petersburg, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, July 16, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.



The Battle of Cold Harbor, June 1-3, 1864<sup>582</sup>

<sup>582</sup> Hess, 228.

## Chapter 12—August-December, 1864

**“During Sept. and Oct. Grant was pushing his lines southward and Cooke’s foot cavalry was engaged in heading him off and keeping him from getting possession of our R. roads.”**

**- Sergeant Joseph F. Maides, Company I<sup>583</sup>**

The beginning of August witnessed yet another change in field command within the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina. After commanding the regiment for barely two months, Captain William Larkins, following a severe bout of dysentery, died in a Richmond hospital on August 1. Lieutenant Strayhorn recalled: “The Capt. that has been commanding the Regt. since Col. Whitfield was wounded died suddenly a few days ago.” With both Lieutenant Colonel Whitfield and Major Webb still absent due to wounds, Captain Calvin Herring of Company D, the next senior company officer present with the regiment, took command. First Lieutenant George Jones now led the company while Captain John Sloan of Company B served as unofficial second in command of the regiment.<sup>584</sup>

While these hurried command changes took place, the officers and men remained huddled within their trenches outside of Petersburg, daily expecting an enemy attack while burrowing further underground in order to escape the nearly constant threat posed by Union artillery fire and sharpshooters. In one of his many reports on operations

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<sup>583</sup> Joseph F. Maides, Petersburg, Virginia, to his mother, Jones County, North Carolina, October, 1864, Joseph F. Maides Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Sloan, 107.

<sup>584</sup> Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, in the trenches east of Petersburg, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, August 7, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Sloan, 97-98; Jordan and Manarin, 39, 82-83.

around Petersburg, Major General Henry Heth stated: “my division occupied portions of the lines and at points were subjected to incessant fire from the enemy’s sharpshooters and shelling from his batteries.” One officer in the Twenty-Seventh wrote: “We were separated from the enemy by so brief a space that there was danger in exposing one’s head for a single instant above the works.” The opposing lines were too close to allow the deployment of pickets or skirmishers so the regiment was forced to maintain a constant presence in the main line. The men operated in shifts with one-third of the regiment on duty at any given time while the remainder waited slightly to the rear, positioned in a series of reserve earthworks. The threat from enemy fire as well as the intense sun that beat down remorselessly on the men, forced the Confederate defenders of Petersburg to dig deeper into the ground for protection. According to Captain Sloan, “we literally lived under the ground. We had to pass to and from the front in covered ways; our rations were all prepared in the rear, and sent to us. We were compelled to sleep in bomb-proofs to avoid their mortar shells, with which they enlivened the scene at night.” In addition to these dangers, it was erroneously believed that the Federals were planning another mine underneath the Confederate defenses. James Graham described the situation: “It was supposed that a battery on our front adjoining the one blown up was also mined, and twas probable that at any minute of the day or night, another explosion might take place beneath us; as time went by, however, we gradually became accustomed to the actual and supposed dangers of our position, and passed the time with less inconvenience than could be supposed possible.”<sup>585</sup>

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<sup>585</sup> Sloan, 104; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 330; James Graham, “Campaign of 1864,”

To add to the misery of their position, many soldiers, continually afflicted with heat, sweat, and dust, were not able to change their underclothing on a regular basis. In a letter to his sister written in early August, Lieutenant Strayhorn stated: "I am anxious to go to the rear where I can have the benefit of shade for a few days and an opportunity of putting on some clean clothes, I have been wearing the clothes I now have on for more than a fortnight—you know I must be dirty wallowing in the trenches, our wagons with the baggage is six or eight miles in the rear and only come up about once in two weeks." Almost as an answer to the men's prayers, Cooke's Brigade was relieved on the evening of August 9 by the North Carolina regiments of Brigadier General William MacRae's Brigade<sup>586</sup> and allowed nearly a weeks rest in the rear. Positioned a mile or more behind the front lines, the troops were given a chance to rest as well as clean themselves and their clothes. Writing again to his sister on August 11, Lieutenant Strayhorn was greatly relieved: "I am feeling very well this morning after getting a load of dirt off my clothes and person. I hope we will not have to go into those trenches any more, they are so dusty and hot you can get no air at all."<sup>587</sup>

While recuperating in the rear, some of the men received special packages from home. Although scarcity and inflation had all but destroyed the Southern economy by this stage of the war, many families still managed to send their loved ones in the army a

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unspecified newspaper article which appeared in North Carolina possibly in the 1880's or 90's, found in General John R. Cooke's Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Hess, 240-41.

<sup>586</sup> MacRae had recently been promoted to command of Kirkland's Brigade following that officer's wounding at Cold Harbor on June 2, he had previously served as Colonel of the Fifteenth North Carolina of Cooke's Brigade.

<sup>587</sup> Hess, 240; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, near Petersburg, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, August 7 and 11, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

little something special, such as a small box of extra food or clothing. Thomas Strayhorn wrote: "All the boys in the company received boxes nearly. I noticed one that was pretty nice, [Private Meredith] Adams had some nice bacon, flour and lots of other things...how do some people manage to get along so well, it is a mystery to me." Another diversion that several soldiers indulged in was a visit to Petersburg. Despite the high prices of the city's marketplace, the men enjoyed getting away from camp, if only for a short time, and visiting with the townsfolk, especially the ladies. On August 15, the troops were greeted with a heavy rainstorm, which, despite the general lack of shelter, was greatly appreciated by all as it stifled the dust and cooled the air, if only for a little while. Unfortunately for the men of the regiment, Cooke's Brigade was ordered back to the front the next day. This time, the troops were placed slightly to the right of their previous position, probably at or near Rives' Salient. Despite the move, the situation remained largely the same. The officers and men once again found themselves digging deeper into the ground for protection from enemy fire while keeping a sharp lookout for any signs of movement to their front. Lieutenant Strayhorn recalled: "[There is] no news of any importance, every thing remains pretty much the same around Petersburg." In trying to describe the regiment's time in the trenches, Sergeant Joseph F. Maides of Company I told his mother: "I would like to describe what we went through in this torrid weather in those trenches but the task is too much for me."<sup>588</sup>

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<sup>588</sup> Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, near Petersburg, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, August 11 and 16, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Trudeau, 91-97; Sloan, 104; Joseph F. Maides, Petersburg, Virginia, to his mother, Jones County, North Carolina, October, 1864, Joseph F. Maides Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

While Lee and Grant battled it out for control of Petersburg, Jubal Early had succeeded in pushing Federal forces out of the Shenandoah Valley and even made an extraordinary raid to the outskirts of Washington itself. This Confederate success forced Union planners to respond immediately in order to secure the capital, re-organize the scattered Federal forces in the region, and push Early's army back into the Valley. Grant's choice for this assignment was Phillip Sheridan, the aggressive commander of the Army of the Potomac's Cavalry Corps. He would be joined by the Union Sixth Corps as well as two of his own cavalry divisions. Lee responded to this Union buildup by dispatching Major General Joseph Kershaw's Division of the First Corps to join Early in the Valley, further weakening his already thin defenses. While these forces squared off in the lower Shenandoah, Grant ordered a series of offensives against both Richmond and Petersburg that were designed to further envelope the latter city and cut the Weldon Railroad, Lee's main north-south supply line, which linked the Army of Northern Virginia with the outside world via the blockade running port of Wilmington, North Carolina.<sup>589</sup>

The joint Union operations began on August 13 with the movement of Winfield Hancock's Second Corps from its trenches outside of Petersburg to a bridgehead at Deep Bottom. Here they were joined by elements of the Tenth Corps under Major General David Birney. It was Hancock's mission to provide a serious demonstration against Richmond that would cause Lee to detach large numbers of troops from the defenses of

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<sup>589</sup> Trudeau, 142-46, John Horn, *The Petersburg Campaign: The Destruction of the Weldon Railroad: Deep Bottom, Globe Tavern, and Reams Station, August 14-25, 1864*, (Lynchburg, VA: H. E. Howard, Inc., 1991), 1-7.

Petersburg. Hancock was also free to move on the Confederate capital in force if an opening existed. Opposing the Federals was Charles Field's Division of the First Corps as well as reserve troops from the Department of Richmond. The plan was virtually a repeat of the late July operation in preparation for the explosion of Burnside's mine. Despite heavy fighting from August 14-20, Hancock's forces failed to breach the Confederate lines, which had been greatly reinforced by numerous brigades from Petersburg. Combined casualties for the operation numbered more than 4,000 but Grant had managed to distract Lee's attention from the Weldon Railroad. Lee himself had even gone to Deep Bottom to organize the defense. The second element of the operation began on August 18 with the movement of Gouverneur Warren's Fifth Corps from its camps southeast of Petersburg to the vicinity of Globe Tavern, also known as Yellow Tavern, located on the railroad about four miles south of the city. Once in position, Warren's troops began tearing up track. The Federals also set about erecting breastworks and probing northward in preparation for a Confederate counterattack.<sup>590</sup>

With Lee currently headquartered north of the James River, the immediate defense of Petersburg was left in the hands of General P.G.T. Beauregard. Following the detachment of several brigades, Beauregard was left with only four under strength infantry divisions and one brigade of cavalry to defend Petersburg and deal with Warren's movement against the Weldon Railroad. Believing that the Federal thrust was nothing more than a raiding party, Beauregard ordered General A.P. Hill, still in command of the Third Corps despite his ongoing sickness, to implement a small

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<sup>590</sup> Horn, *Destruction of the Weldon Railroad*, 8-60; Trudeau, 142-62; Kennedy, 356-57.

counterattack down the railroad. Hill delegated the attack to General Henry Heth, who quickly organized two of his brigades, Davis and Walker's, into a strike force and headed south from his division's trenches outside of Petersburg. Cooke and MacRae's brigades remained behind and quickly spread out to fill in the gaps in the line. For the remainder of day on the eighteenth, Heth's two brigades slowly drove the Federals back in confused and bloody fighting. By nightfall, the Confederates had pushed the enemy back nearly one mile and captured more than 200 prisoners. Despite this minor success, Heth realized that he was greatly outnumbered and would require reinforcements in order to continue the attack the next day.<sup>591</sup>

Over the next two days, Heth's brigades were slowly reinforced by elements of William Mahone's Division and other individual brigades from the Petersburg defenses. Meanwhile, elements of the Union Ninth Corps arrived to assist Warren's defense around Globe Tavern. On the nineteenth, a joint attack by Heth and Mahone sliced into the Union lines on both sides of the railroad and resulted in the capture of nearly 2,700 Union soldiers. The victory was an impressive feat but the Federals remained entrenched around the tavern and continued to tear up additional segments of the railroad to the south. During this time, Cooke's Brigade remained entrenched in front of Petersburg, waiting for further marching orders. Those orders arrived on August 20 when Heth ordered both Cooke and MacRae's brigades to vacate the trenches and head south; their position was quickly relieved by the exhausted soldiers of Davis and Walker's brigades.

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<sup>591</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 473; Trudeau, 160-64; Horn, 54-68.

Heth and Mahone, under orders from Beauregard, planned to launch another coordinated assault against Warren on the twenty-first. In his report on the operation, Heth stated:

August 20 was taken up in making the necessary disposition for an attack on August 21. Davis and Walker's Brigades were ordered to relieve Cooke's and MacRae's Brigades, who were in the trenches before Petersburg. These last two mentioned brigades took position near the Davis House [while] Mathew Ransom's North Carolina Brigade reported to me for duty [as well]. Cooke's Brigade was held in reserve with orders to protect the left flank of the attacking force.<sup>592</sup>

After leaving the trenches via a covered way and marching south for about three miles in the dark, Cooke's Brigade arrived in the vicinity of the Davis farm around midnight. Once in position, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh bivouacked slightly to the east of the Weldon Railroad and tried to get some sleep despite a heavy rain shower, the men grateful to at least be out of the trenches. The Confederate plan for August 21 called on Mahone's Division to launch the main assault from the west while Heth's three North Carolina brigades provided a strong demonstration against the northern face of the Federal earthworks. Advancing southward around dawn with Ransom's Brigade on their right and slightly in advance, Cooke's Brigade pushed through a cornfield and into a dense wood. Second Lieutenant Thomas Strayhorn recalled the opening of the action: "Sunday morning just at daylight our regiment took up the line of march and at 7 o'clock we were close upon the yankees and were halted and formed in line of battle, after the elapse of an hour or so the brigade was ordered forward and soon came upon the enemy's works which the most of them had left very hurriedly." Coming upon a line of abandoned earthworks, the troops continued south only to run into

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<sup>592</sup> Horn, 69-95; Trudeau, 164-70; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 473-74; Kennedy, 357; Hess, 243.

part of a swamp, which disordered their alignment and generally slowed down the attack. At this point, the regiment also began coming up against Union skirmishers but quickly drove them away before pushing forward into the woods, which began to open up slightly.<sup>593</sup>

At the edge of the woods stood another line of abandoned Federal earthworks. As the regiment reached this line an open field spread out before them. On the other side, possibly 400 yards distant, stood yet another line of breastworks, this one manned by the better part of three enemy divisions and supported by twenty-six guns. Before Cooke and Ransom could even leave the wood line, their ranks were subjected to a severe fire of case shot and canister from the Union artillery. Having become entangled in the swamp and delayed by Federal skirmishers, these two brigades launched their attack after MacRae's regiments had already tried and failed to storm the Union earthworks closer to the railroad. Despite a determined push into the open fields of the Dunlop farm, Cooke's troops were stopped in their tracks by a series of obstructions including several rows of abatis as well as knee-level telegraph wire that had been strung across tree stumps to further impede any Confederate attack. These obstructions, combined with the severe fire coming from the Federal artillery, forced the two brigades back into the woods, where they quickly reformed their lines and awaited further orders. In the same letter quoted above, Lieutenant Strayhorn described the failed attack:

Ransom's brigade was on our right and a little in advance and after carrying the [second] line of the enemy's works advanced two or three

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<sup>593</sup> Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, near Petersburg, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, August 22, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Horn, 96-101.

hundred yards beyond and the yankees poured such a hot and terrible fire of grape and canister into them they were compelled to retire which they did in no very good order. Our brigade suffered more I expect from the grape and canister than Ransom's, it passing over their heads and striking in a portion of our line. Our brigade, learning that Ransom's had been ordered to fall back to the second line of the enemy's works and form, also fell back to the same line which was only a few feet in our rear.<sup>594</sup>

While Heth's brigades tried and failed to breach the Federal line's northern face, Mahone launched his attack against the western front of the Union position. Despite utilizing five brigades, Mahone came up against the strongest part of the enemy line and was rebuffed with heavy casualties, especially among Hagood and Harris' brigades. The twin Confederate failures on August 21 brought an end to the battles of Globe Tavern. Despite inflicting far greater casualties on the Federals, Southern troops had not succeeded in crushing Warren's force or in preserving Lee's hold on the Weldon Railroad. In spite of the failure of the operation, General Heth lavished praise on the performance of his troops: "I ordered our attack, which was made by MacRae, Ransom and Cooke in gallant style carrying several lines of works, in fact all of the enemy's lines, except one, extending across the railroad near the Yellow Tavern." Overall casualties for the four-day engagement numbered slightly over 2,000 for the Confederates versus more than 4,300 Federals, including nearly 3,000 men captured. The Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, which had gone into battle with less than 200 men commanded by Captain Herring, suffered eight confirmed casualties, mostly the result of Union artillery fire. Included in this total were three men killed and five wounded. Lieutenant Strayhorn,

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<sup>594</sup> Horn, 101-103; Hess, 243-45; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, near Petersburg, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, August 22, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

whose Company G alone lost five men, believed that the regiment's casualty figures were actually much higher. He recalled, "Our regiment lost some 25 or thirty killed and wounded, out of that number my company lost five." As in previous battles, the actual number of those who fell will probably never be known for certain. Included among the dead were Captain James F. Manker of Company H, who was quickly replaced by First Lieutenant Henry Price, and the letter writer Private Samuel P. Lockhart of Company G, whose last correspondence home included a request for a pair of socks and a bar of soap.<sup>595</sup>

With Union control over the Weldon Railroad now assured, Lee ordered Hill's multi-division strike force to withdraw from the area around Globe Tavern and return to the defenses of Petersburg. According to General Heth, "During the night of August 21 my troops were withdrawn from the works they had captured and took position behind our lines defending Petersburg." Abandoning the captured earthworks at the far edge of the Davis cornfield, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh retraced their steps back to the trenches where they were once again subjected to Federal artillery and sharpshooter fire. Writing to his sister on August 22, Lieutenant Strayhorn recalled, "we came into the fortifications last night about midnight...At the close of the fight the yankees were still in possession of the railroad and I fear it will take some time and at a considerable cost of life before we get them away from it...I hope I will not have to go

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<sup>595</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 474; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, near Petersburg, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, August 22, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Horn, 96-113; Trudeau, 171-74; Samuel P. Lockhart, Petersburg, Virginia, to Ellen Lockhart, Orange County, North Carolina, July 20, 1864, Hugh Conway Browning Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

into another fight down there.” During the next two days, Cooke and MacRae’s brigades were slowly sidled to the west and south and put to work erecting new earthworks on the west side of the Weldon Railroad and southwest of Petersburg. It was Lee’s intention to contain the Union threat from Globe Tavern by extending his lines to the south and west, roughly paralleling the Boydton Plank Road, which now became his primary supply line from the south. Following the loss of the railroad, the Confederate Quartermaster and Commissary Departments were forced to utilize wagon trains to haul supplies from Stony Creek Depot, nearly twenty miles south of Petersburg, to Dinwiddie Court House before eventually turning onto the Boydton Road and on into the city.<sup>596</sup>

In an effort to further restrict Lee’s access to supplies via the Weldon Railroad, Grant ordered elements of Hancock’s Second Corps, supported by a small force of cavalry, to continue destroying track south of Globe Tavern. The large raiding force’s destination was Reams Station, a small depot on the railroad nearly ten miles south of Petersburg neighbored by the Oak Grove Church. Federal troops had fortified the area in late June as part of a failed cavalry raid into Southside Virginia, but since then the earthworks had been severely weakened by heavy rain and overall neglect. Hancock’s force, which was made up of 6,500 infantry, 2,000 cavalry, and sixteen guns, left its camps southeast of Petersburg beginning on the morning of August 24 and arrived at Reams Station later that day. Once in position, the Federals began strengthening the fortifications and tearing up track in both directions. The Second Corps was now nearly

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<sup>596</sup> Hess, 247; Horn, 111-13; Trudeau, 174-75; Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, near Petersburg, Virginia, to his sister, Orange County, North Carolina, August 22, 1864, Mary E. Strayhorn Berry Papers, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

five miles from any possible support. Lee, informed of the enemy presence at Reams Station by elements of Major General Wade Hampton's Cavalry Corps, whose troopers repeatedly skirmished with Hancock's cavalry, reacted quickly to this new threat. The commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, wanting to avoid a repeat of the piecemeal and failed attacks witnessed at Globe Tavern, immediately gave General A.P. Hill direct control of eight brigades with which to not only drive the Second Corps from its position but to destroy this isolated enemy force. Hill's strike force, which would be heavily supported by two divisions of Hampton's cavalry, was made up of elements of four different divisions from two corps. Included in the order of battle were Cooke and MacRae's brigades of Heth's Division. Contrary to Lieutenant Strayhorn's hopes, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina would soon be engaged once again along the Weldon Railroad.<sup>597</sup>

By around 4 o'clock in the afternoon on August 24, Heth's two brigades had joined Hill's strike force near the southwestern corner of the Petersburg defenses, close to the city's lead works. Under a hot afternoon sun, Hill's troops marched south on Squirrel Level Road until reaching the intersection of the Vaughn Road. From here Cooke's Brigade continued on for a few miles before reaching Armstrong's Mill on Rowanty Creek. This roundabout route was necessary in order to avoid the continued Union presence near Globe Tavern. Having crossed the Rowanty, the officers and men of the regiment went into bivouac and got some rest following the day's ten-mile march. Wilcox's Division pushed further down the road to Holly Church before likewise

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<sup>597</sup> Horn, 114-121, 203-207; Trudeau, 174-81.

stopping for the night. The next morning, Hill's troops were roused around 7:00 a.m. and quickly put in motion to the south towards the intersection of the Monk's Neck Road, which, in connection with the Stage and Depot roads, would lead them to Reams Station. It was Hill's intention to attack from the west while Hampton's cavalry hit the enemy from the south and east. Wilcox's Division, being first in the order of march, would constitute the main attacking force while Heth's troops, reinforced by two brigades of Mahone's Division, were to remain in reserve, at least temporarily.<sup>598</sup>

Throughout the morning hours and into the early afternoon, Cooke's Brigade continued south and east along Vaughn and Monk's Neck roads. Around noon, Heth halted his troops near Gravelly Run for a brief rest. To their front, several miles to the east, Wilcox's Division engaged Hancock's pickets and slowly pushed forward toward Reams Station. Meanwhile, Hampton's troopers became locked in severe firefight with Union cavalry and infantry several miles to the south. General Heth reported: "When within one mile of Reams Station, we heard brisk skirmishing going on between our troops, under General Wilcox, and the enemy." About 2 o'clock, Wilcox launched his attack against the western face of Hancock's U-shaped perimeter, held by Brigadier General Nelson Miles' Division of New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians. Advancing from the cover of trees into an open field, Wilcox's troops, slowed by several lines of abatis and pummeled by intense musketry fire, came within yards of the enemy's line before being forced to fall back into the woods. On the right of the attacking force, Samuel McGowan's Brigade of South Carolinians paused behind a slight rise in a cornfield from

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<sup>598</sup> Horn, 120-21, 205; Trudeau, 178-84; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 474; Hess, 248; Clark, 447.

which they kept up a heavy and accurate fire against the Federal earthworks. As Wilcox worked to reorganize his four brigades for another attack, Heth's troops arrived on the battlefield at around 3:00 p.m.<sup>599</sup>

By this point in the battle, Hill, once again suffering from his illness, was inclined toward calling off any further attack and withdrawing his troops back towards Petersburg. Believing that the battle was all but lost, the Third Corps commander wanted to avoid a repeat of the heavy casualties witnessed at Globe Tavern four days earlier. Upon his arrival, General Heth immediately conferred with Cooke and MacRae as well as Wilcox. After viewing the enemy works and the open fields to their front, Heth's two brigadiers believed that their men could take the position if properly supported by Wilcox's Division. Upon hearing their argument, Hill reconsidered his decision and eventually ordered the frontal assault to proceed. Preparation for the assault consumed more than two hours of rapidly diminishing daylight. While McGowan's sharpshooters continued picking off any Federals who dared to show their heads above the earthworks, Heth arranged his attack force. Brigadier General Cooke's Brigade was placed in the center of the line, the left formed within the same stand of trees from which Wilcox had launched his earlier attack while the right abutted out into an open field. According to James Graham's post-war history of the regiment, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina was posted on the left end of the brigade. To Cooke's right and slightly to the rear, positioned across the Depot Road, was MacRae's Brigade, while on the left, James Lane's Brigade of North Carolinians, now commanded by Brigadier General James Conner, would

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<sup>599</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 474; Horn, 122-37; Trudeau, 184-86; Hess, 248.

provide Wilcox's promised assistance. Finally, the guns of Lieutenant Colonel William Pegram's Artillery Battalion, ordered to provide a preparatory bombardment, were positioned in open fields slightly south of the Depot Road. Altogether, the infantry force mustered fewer than 1,800 men and consisted entirely of North Carolina troops. Opposing them, the entrenched Federals of Miles' Division, perhaps 3,000 men strong, hunkered down in response to McGowan's sharpshooters and awaited another Confederate attack across the open fields to their front.<sup>600</sup>

At 5:00 p.m. Pegram's seventeen guns opened fire, causing little real damage to the Federal works but knocking out several artillery pieces and demoralizing the many green draftees within Miles' ranks. Following a fifteen to twenty minute barrage, the Confederate infantry assault commenced. According to General Heth: "The enemy were strongly fortified at Reams Station, his works running parallel to the railroad for about one-half mile and then suddenly bending back at a considerable angle. A portion of the enemy's breastworks were protected by obstructions formed by felling timber for 150 yards in front, rendering the works seemingly unapproachable from the front." These obstructions were directly in the path of the left half of Cooke's Brigade, including the Twenty-Seventh. Compensating for the time it would take the troops to negotiate the abatis, Heth ordered Cooke's left wing to advance first. Captain Sloan of Company B remembered: "The undergrowth and fallen trees over which we had to climb our way retarded our advance, and Gen. Cooke ordered the 27<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> regiments forward first. When they had gotten sufficiently advanced, he directed the other two regiments of the

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<sup>600</sup> Horn, 137-40, 205-206; Hess, 248-51; Clark, 447-48; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 474-75.

brigade, the 46<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, to advance.” Conner’s Brigade moved forward in tandem with Cooke’s left while MacRae would move in conjunction with Cooke’s right wing.

Advancing out of the woods, the Twenty-Seventh, still commanded by Captain Herring, immediately encountered the obstructions, which quickly disordered the regiment and fractured its battle line. In small groups, the men moved forward under a severe fire of musketry, suffering casualties with almost every step, all the while heading in the general direction of the angle in the enemy’s line. General Heth reported: “Cooke had to advance over an almost impenetrable entanglement. His gallant men, in squads, picked their way through the abatis...this under a sheet of fire from both infantry and artillery.”<sup>601</sup>

Despite heavy casualties, especially among the officers, the Twenty-Seventh and Forty-Eighth regiments managed to reach the earthworks just south of the angle. Captain Sloan recalled, “When we reached the enemy’s works, we found them heavily manned with infantry and artillery. Nothing daunted, however, we still advanced through shot and shell until we came to a hand to hand fight across the breastworks...The colors of the 27<sup>th</sup>, carried by Sergeant Roscoe Richards, of the Orange Guards, were the first seen on their works.” Plastered against the outer face of the earthworks, firing their muskets up and over the embankment, the men of the regiment, many of whom were still navigating the tangle of abatis, were forced to wait for at least five and possibly ten minutes until a sufficient number of their comrades arrived and permitted a surge up and over the line. In the midst of this intense close quarters fight, “Three times Captain Edward Wooten, Company C, finding one the enemy poking his gun up to shoot him, grabbed a handful of

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<sup>601</sup> Sloan, 104, Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 474-75; Horn, 154-55.

dirt from the embankment and dashed it in the eyes of his opponent and thus saved his life.”<sup>602</sup>

As Captain Herring’s men fought for their lives in the semi-darkness, Conner’s Brigade curled around the northern face of the Federal earthworks while Cooke’s right wing and MacRae’s Brigade began their attack to the south. Advancing across an open field at the double quick, the Forty-Sixth and Fifteenth North Carolina regiments received a tremendous fire of musketry and canister. Cooke’s right wavered and began to fall back but ran into MacRae’s advancing units, which propelled them forward once again. As these troops hit the earthworks, Cooke’s left and Conner’s men simultaneously moved up and over the embankment in their fronts, all the while screaming the rebel yell. With this breakthrough, the entire Union position began to collapse. Demoralized to a great degree by Wilcox’s sharpshooters as well as Pegram’s artillery barrage, many Federal conscripts simply did not have the stomach for facing this renewed Confederate attack. Some stood and fought but the majority were forced to flee or surrender. Vaulting over the earthworks, bayonets fixed, the men of the Twenty-Seventh pushed the enemy in front of them down into the railroad cut, where many chose to surrender rather than run the gauntlet of fire now being poured into them from two directions. Some Union soldiers climbed over the earthworks and simply walked to the Confederate rear with hands held high. Captain Sloan described the scene: “The others (Cooke’s right and MacRae’s Brigade) now came up and in a few moments the enemy broke and fled in confusion, leaving their guns... We pursued them, and turned their own guns upon them;

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<sup>602</sup> Clark, 448; Sloan, 104-105; Horn, 155-56; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 475; Wagstaff, 222.

but having no friction primers, we could not use them to advantage.” At some point during this confused melee, the survivors of the regiment apparently managed to capture three enemy flags, an honor never before known to them. As these events transpired, Hampton’s cavalry continued pressing in from the south while part of McGowan’s Brigade arrived to assist Cooke and MacRae in extending the line to the south and pursuing the all but defeated Federals. In addition, the two brigades of Mahone’s Division assigned to Heth also began arriving on the field about this time.<sup>603</sup>

Following the rout of Miles’ troops, Brigadier General John Gibbon’s Division launched a partially successful counterattack towards the Oak Grove Church and the captured earthworks beyond. Although failing to recapture the line, Gibbon’s attack, assisted by the exhaustion and disorganization exhibited by much of Hill’s force, did stop any further Confederate advance and bought enough time for the remainder of the Second Corps to withdraw in relative safety. Cooke’s regiments, largely disorganized through their own success and having suffered heavier casualties than any other Confederate brigade on the field, still managed to offer determined resistance to this Union counterattack, giving ground only grudgingly until being flanked on their left and forced to fall back to the captured earthworks. By 6:30, Hancock, acutely aware of his distance from the bulk of the Army of the Potomac and unsure of how many Confederates he was facing, ordered a withdrawal to the northeast, leaving the enemy in possession of the field. En route back toward the Jerusalem Plank Road, the survivors of the Second Corps

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<sup>603</sup> Horn, 156-165; Clark, 448; Sloan, 105; Hess, 250-54; Joseph F. Maides, Petersburg, Virginia, to his mother, Jones County, North Carolina, October, 1864, Joseph F. Maides Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

ran into a division from the Ninth Corps that had been sent to reinforce them. With darkness covering the landscape, the Battle of Reams Station was over.<sup>604</sup>

As a heavy rain began to fall over the battlefield, the exhausted and bloodied men of Hill's Corps took stock of what had been won this day. At a cost of 720 casualties, Confederate forces had killed or wounded slightly more than 600 of the enemy. In addition, they had taken nearly 2,000 unwounded prisoners as well as nine artillery pieces, twelve regimental colors, three of which were reportedly taken by the Twenty-Seventh, and over 3,000 small arms, all this in a frontal assault over open ground against well manned earthworks. The Union Second Corps, the defenders of Cemetery Ridge at Gettysburg and, ironically, the railroad cut at Bristoe Station, as well as Grant's most reliable combat force during the long and bloody Overland Campaign, had received a severe blow from which its men, its commander, and its pride, would never truly recover. By routing the Second Corps at Reams Station, the Army of Northern Virginia had bought a significant amount of time for its continued defense of Petersburg and Richmond. With the Weldon Railroad still intact up to Stony Creek and Grant's offensive plans now at a standstill, Robert E. Lee's army would continue to be supplied with essential ammunition, food, and clothing for the foreseeable future. In addition, a Confederate defeat at Reams Station, which up until the success of the final assault was a distinct possibility, may have led to a further Union drive against the Boydton Plank Road, thereby completely severing Lee's supply lines from the south and all but assuring the fall of the Confederate capital in a matter of days or weeks. The determined and

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<sup>604</sup> Horn, 162-170; Trudeau, 187-89; Hess, 254.

courageous actions of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, whose colors were the first to be seen on the enemy's earthworks, contributed greatly to the ultimate Confederate success at Reams Station.<sup>605</sup>

Persevering against all odds and turning what could have been a costly defeat into a remarkable and stunning victory, the officers and men of the assault force, especially Cooke's Brigade, received much praise from both General Heth as well as Robert E. Lee himself. In his report on the battle, Heth proudly stated: "Cooke's and MacRae's Brigades won for themselves on this day fresh laurels, sufficient indeed to have given them a most enviable reputation among the many gallant brigades of the Army of Northern Virginia." The division commander went on to state: "This charge and its results has proved to me that nothing is impossible to men determined to win. The coolness and determination as evinced by all and expressed by many officers and men as I passed down the line, a few minutes before the attack was made, carried with it a conviction of success." That success was also known to the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia who, in an August 26 telegram to Confederate Secretary of War James Seddon, wrote:

Genl A.P. Hill attacked the enemy in his entrenchments at Reams' Station yesterday evening, and at the second assault carried his entire line. Cooke's and MacRae's North Carolina Brigades, under Genl Heth, and Lane's North Carolina Brigade, of Wilcox's Division, composed the assaulting column. Our profound gratitude is due to the giver of all victories, and our thanks to the brave men and officers engaged.

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<sup>605</sup> Horn, 171-76; Trudeau, 189-91.

In a letter to North Carolina Governor Zebulon Vance, written soon after the battle, General Lee once again praised the fighting abilities of North Carolina's soldiers and thanked the governor for his state's contributions to the Confederate cause.<sup>606</sup>

In playing their decisive role in this important victory, Cooke's Brigade and the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina had suffered heavily. The brigade lost upwards of 300 men killed or wounded during its brief but bloody assault against the Federal entrenchments, perhaps half of its strength and nearly forty percent of the total Confederate loss. The Twenty-Seventh suffered fifty-two confirmed casualties including eight men killed and forty-four wounded, eight of whom later died of their wounds. Partly confirming these numbers, Private David Thompson of Company G wrote: "The Brigade lost a good many men but achieved a great victory, our Regiment lost about sixty killed and wounded." Most of these casualties occurred while the troops navigated the obstructions and abatis in front of the earthworks. For a regiment already functioning with a skeleton complement, caused by the continued absence of numerous sick and wounded soldiers, these losses had a major impact. Having gone into the fight with less than 150 officers and men, Captain Sloan, possibly exaggerating, reported that "The 27<sup>th</sup> regiment came out of the fight with less than seventy-five men!" Casualties were fairly evenly spread out among the ten companies, but some units suffered more than others. Companies A, B, and G each lost seven men while Company H lost eight soldiers.

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<sup>606</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 475; Dowdey, 845; Horn, 175.

Amazingly, Sergeant Roscoe Richards, the regimental color bearer, emerged from the fight unscathed.<sup>607</sup>

As mentioned previously, casualties were very heavy among the regiment's officers. The highest-ranking officer to fall was Captain Calvin Herring, whose unspecified wound would keep him out of action for several months. Captain John Sloan of Company B immediately assumed command of the regiment while Sergeant Thomas J. Rhodes now led the "Guilford Grays." Regimental Adjutant Walter Ashland Knight and Captain Benjamin F. Skinner of Company F were both killed in action while Second Lieutenant Thomas Jackson Strayhorn, whose recent correspondence proved somewhat prophetic, received a severe wound in the right shoulder that ultimately proved fatal. These three officers were replaced as quickly as possible. Thaddeus E. Pittman of Wayne County, formerly sergeant major of the regiment, was promoted to first lieutenant and assumed the role of adjutant. Sergeant William E. Ward of Company I was quickly slated to replace Pittman as sergeant major. Company F, like Company B completely bereft of officers following the death of Captain Skinner, was now led by Sergeant William A. Wilson, soon to be elected third lieutenant. In Company G, the mortal wounding of Lieutenant Strayhorn, coupled with the continued absence of Captain Stephen Dickson and First Lieutenant James Graham due to sickness and wounds, meant that an unspecified sergeant, possibly Olin F. Hatch of Wake County, assumed command of what remained of the company. Overall, the severe losses suffered at Reams Station,

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<sup>607</sup> Sloan, 105; Jordan and Manarin, 7-98; Horn, 156, 171; Clark, 448; David Thompson, Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, August 30, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

in conjunction with those from the Overland Campaign as well as numerous engagements and skirmishes during the last several months, continued a process begun at Sharpsburg and accentuated at Bristoe Station. By its very success as a disciplined and determined unit, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, much like the rest of the Confederate army, was slowly bleeding itself to death in its continued heroic service to the cause of Southern independence.<sup>608</sup>

That night, Heth's two brigades, laden with hundreds of Federal prisoners, marched westward and bivouacked on the west side of Rowanty Creek amid a heavy rain shower. The next day, August 26, Cooke and MacRae's Brigades, largely retracing their original route, marched the remaining distance back to Petersburg where their recent victory was celebrated with a triumphal parade of sorts. With Cooke's sadly reduced Brigade in the lead, the troops marched into the city serenaded by the music of the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina's Moravian band. Following the procession, both brigades eventually went into camp alongside the Halifax Road near the southern edge of the city. In this position, the troops were allowed to rest for three days and nights, getting some much needed sleep and a chance to write home to loved ones. This period of rest ended quickly however, when, on August 29, General Heth received orders to move his detached force back into the trenches south of town. Here Cooke and MacRae's troops rejoined the other two brigades of the division and once again set about the daily routines of siege life.<sup>609</sup>

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<sup>608</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98; Sloan, 106.

<sup>609</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 476; Hess, 256-57.

Throughout the remainder of the year, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, as well as the rest of Heth's Division, were occupied in holding the earthworks directly south of Petersburg and in constructing and manning new defensive lines to the southwest of the city, largely paralleling the Boydton Plank Road. The roadway, along with the tracks of the Southside Railroad only a few miles to the north, took on even more significance as the siege continued, providing Lee's army with the majority of its daily supplies up until the end of the campaign in April 1865. Although not heavily involved in any major engagements during this time, Cooke's Brigade materially aided the Confederate defense of Petersburg and its supply lines through their untiring construction efforts, interspersed with numerous days and nights spent on picket duty in the fields and forests to the front of the earthworks. General Heth described his division's actions during late August and into September: "From August 26 until September 27 my division took no part in any engagement, but continued to occupy positions in the trenches around Petersburg and erecting new works west of the Weldon Railroad."<sup>610</sup>

Initially positioned in the fortifications directly south of the city and to the east of the Weldon Railroad, Cooke's Brigade was once again subjected to intense Union artillery and sharpshooter fire. In addition, Union and Confederate gunners made special use of mortars in order to lob shells up and over the rival earthworks. Cramped up in the trenches and bombproof shelters for days at a time, the troops had little to occupy their thoughts. Many once again turned to writing letters home as a way to relieve the

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<sup>610</sup> Trudeau, 192-206; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 476.

monotony of their situation. Writing to his mother on September 13, Private David Thompson described the current state of affairs: “Everything is as quiet as usual here now. There is not many minutes in the day that there is not a cannon heard on some part of the line...sharpshooting is kept up all the time more or less on the lines, occasionally a man is killed or wounded.” Sergeant Maides of Company I, writing on the twenty-third, echoed Thompson’s statement: “We have been in the trenches 24 days subjected to sharpshooting and mortar shelling, but we have been very lucky so far we have not had any killed or wounded [in the company] since we have been in the trenches.” Despite the constant threat of enemy fire, casualties during the month of September were very low for the regiment and the brigade. Nevertheless, men were still being killed and wounded. Captain Sloan, still in temporary command of the regiment, recalled: “On the 13<sup>th</sup>, Samuel E. B. Gray was killed in the trenches before Petersburg, and on the 27<sup>th</sup>, private Wm. N. Kirkman. About the same time, Sergeant Daniel McConnell, while lying sick in the field hospital in rear of our lines, was seriously injured by a shell passing through the hospital and so near to him as to cause a paralysis of his limbs, from which he died.” On September 16, MacRae’s Brigade, which had been constructing a second line of earthworks to the rear of Cooke’s men, marched off to the west and south, where they assisted several other brigades of Henry Heth and Charles Field’s divisions in preparing a new defensive line along Squirrel Level Road. Cooke’s troops, along with another of Heth’s brigades, were left in their positions south of Petersburg, at least for the moment.<sup>611</sup>

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<sup>611</sup> David Thompson, Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, September

In addition to simply holding their assigned position on the main line, the men of the regiment participated in regular picket duties to the front of the earthworks, continually keeping a watchful eye on the enemy only a few hundred yards away. Despite putting the soldiers in greater physical danger, picket duty gave the men a chance to stretch out and get some fresh air, away from the confining nature of the main line fortifications. In a letter to his mother written in late September, Private Thompson stated: "Our Co. went out of the ditches this morning and came back at 12 o'clock, our Co. goes out [on picket] every day." In a previous letter, Thompson had mentioned that, due to the cramped conditions of the earthworks or "ditches," he was unable to write a letter home until sent on out picket duty.<sup>612</sup>

Throughout September and into the following months, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina slowly recovered from its heavy losses suffered during the battles of August. In his letter of September 13, Private David Thompson mentioned that Company G now had upwards of fifteen men on duty in the trenches. Though far from ideal, this was a far cry better than the size of any one company in the immediate aftermath of Reams Station. Given the continual return of the sick and slightly wounded from hospitals in Richmond and Petersburg, it is likely that the regiment rebounded to a total strength of close to 200 officers and men by the end of the month. In terms of officers, by mid-September each company had at least one lieutenant on duty. The only exception was Company B, whose

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13, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Joseph F. Maides, Petersburg, Virginia, to his mother, Jones County, North Carolina, September 23, 1864, Joseph F. Maides Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Sloan, 106; Hess, 258.

<sup>612</sup> David Thompson, Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, September 24 and 29, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

sole officer, Captain John Sloan, continued to command the regiment. In Company F, Sergeant William Wilson was elected third lieutenant while Company G finally acquired a commanding officer when First Lieutenant James Graham returned to duty sometime in mid September, following months of recovering from his Wilderness leg wound.<sup>613</sup>

The return of numerous wounded and sick officers and soldiers to the ranks during this time coincided with the arrival of dozens of conscripts from training camps in North Carolina. In August alone, twenty-three men were assigned to the regiment while September witnessed the arrival of fourteen additional draftees. In contrast to the slow trickle of new arrivals witnessed throughout 1863 and early 1864, during a five-month period, from August to December, seventy-six conscripts and transferees were assigned to individual companies within the regiment based on immediate need. Many, if not most of these new soldiers, were enlisted against their will and, unlike most of the original volunteers, did not join companies from their home counties or sections. The vast majority of the conscripts who joined the ranks of the Twenty-Seventh during this time hailed from the central and western Piedmont of North Carolina, particularly from Stanly, Randolph, Iredell, Alamance, and Union counties. This influx of new men would prove to be the last such infusion of strength into the regiment. By the end of 1864, North Carolina's military age population had been all but used up by the war effort.<sup>614</sup>

Meanwhile, as the Twenty-Seventh licked its wounds and slowly recovered its strength, the siege of Petersburg and Richmond continued unabated. Lee continued to

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<sup>613</sup> David Thompson, Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, September 13, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 193-95; Jordan and Manarin, 20-21, 53, 62.

<sup>614</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

focus his attention on protecting his remaining supply lines while Grant constantly shifted his forces on both sides of the James River in the hopes of cutting off those very lines of supply and possibly effecting a major breakthrough into Petersburg and or Richmond. To that end, Federal forces launched a combined offensive during the last week of September. Once again hoping that Lee would shift troops to the north side of the James in order to protect Richmond, Grant ordered Major General Benjamin Butler to launch an assault against the defenses of the Confederate capital. Meanwhile, elements of Gouverneur Warren's Fifth Corps and Major General John G. Parke's Ninth Corps would converge near Peebles farm, a few miles west of Globe Tavern, and proceed in heavy force toward the Boydton Plank Road with a view to cutting off the roadway and continuing on towards the Southside Railroad. On September 29, Butler attacked Confederate positions along New Market Heights and at Fort Harrison, a vital fortification southeast of Richmond. Despite heavy Union casualties, the Army of the James managed to seize the fort and held it against a strong Confederate counterattack the next day. In order to protect the capital and contain the Union breakthrough, Lee was forced to transfer large numbers of troops from Petersburg to Richmond, thereby weakening his defenses south of the James and putting an even heavier burden on the men who remained in those defenses, including Cooke's Brigade and the men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina.<sup>615</sup>

On September 30, following a day of cavalry skirmishing along Squirrel Level Road, Warren and Parke moved forward only to find that A.P. Hill's infantry, initially

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<sup>615</sup> Trudeau, 202-14; Kennedy, 362-68.

deployed behind hastily constructed breastworks, had fallen back toward the Boydton Plank Road, leaving only a covering force of Confederate cavalry in the advanced lines along the Squirrel Level Road. Easily driving back the dismounted cavalymen, the Fifth and Ninth corps advanced up Church Road but quickly became disoriented by the occasionally thick woods and the lack of Confederate opposition. Further to the northwest the Confederate infantry reformed behind a second line of temporary works in front of the Boydton Plank Road. Here, General Heth organized two of his brigades as well as elements of Wilcox's Division to attack the Federal advance near the Jones farm. The Confederate attack, launched around 5:00 p.m., hit the Ninth Corps in the flank and pushed the enemy back, inflicting heavy casualties and capturing hundreds of prisoners in the process. With their advance at a standstill and darkness approaching, Warren and Park ordered a temporary halt to the offensive. While the battle lines developed to the southwest of Petersburg, Cooke's Brigade continued to man its section of the fortifications directly south of the city. On the twenty-ninth, the troops received orders to be prepared to move at a moments warning. Writing to his mother, Private Thompson commented: "We have just got orders to be ready to be relieved at dark and have three days rations in haversacks, I don't know what it is about." Marching out of the earthworks sometime that night or early the next morning, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh moved west and took up position behind the Boydton Plank Road defenses, somewhere near Battery Forty-Five. From here they could likely hear the sounds of battle at Jones farm. Although not engaged on September 30, they stood ready

to assist other Confederate troops in driving back this latest Federal offensive the next day.<sup>616</sup>

The early morning hours of October 1 saw much activity within the Confederate defenses south and west of Petersburg. Having had great success against the enemy so far, General Hill looked for another weak spot in the Federal lines that could be exploited. If the Confederates could initiate another flank attack, but on a larger scale, it was hoped that much of the enemy's force could be driven from the field or even destroyed in detail. After reconnoitering the field, Hill ordered Heth to attack Warren's Fifth Corps, which constituted the Federal right wing and occupied much of the abandoned Confederate line along Squirrel Level Road. During the night, Warren's troops had reversed the old Confederate earthworks and added onto the line, extending it to the east for several hundred yards and almost reaching as far as Fort Wadsworth on the Weldon Railroad near Globe Tavern. Instead of the vulnerable flank envisioned by Hill, the Fifth Corps' position was firmly anchored, well manned, and extremely strong. In preparing his division for the attack, General Heth ordered his far-flung brigades to concentrate near the W.W. Davis house, located on Squirrel Level Road perhaps one mile north of the Union lines. After joining with the other brigades of the division, Cooke's Brigade marched south at first light, quickly reaching the vicinity of the Davis house.<sup>617</sup>

Heth arrayed his division in a double line with two brigades in front and two in rear. Cooke's Brigade took up position on the east side of Squirrel Level Road, directly

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<sup>616</sup> David Thompson, Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, September 29, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Trudeau, 203, 207-14; Hess, 261-64; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 476-77.

<sup>617</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 477; Hess, 265-66; Trudeau, 214-15.

behind Archer's Brigade of Virginia and Tennessee troops. Around 8:00 a.m. the division, preceded by a heavy line of sharpshooters and skirmishers, entered a thick belt of trees and moved forward in the direction of the open fields of the Chappell farm. On the other side of the field stood Warren's earthworks. According to General Heth, "the design was to drive the enemy from the works at this point, and then sweep down the works in the direction of the Church Road, where Wilcox was in position." As his sharpshooters drove back the enemy skirmishers and advanced into the open fields, Heth got his first view of the Union fortifications. From this vantage point, the enemy line looked anything but vulnerable. Heth recalled: "On advancing, the enemy was driven back to the works above mentioned, but after a close and careful reconnoissance he was found to be in heavy force, having strengthened this point as well as his entire line during the night." Following a brief and bloody reconnoissance by MacRae's Brigade, part of which misunderstood the mission to be a full out assault, Heth called off the attack and ordered his troops to retrace their steps back to Battery Forty-Five and the vicinity of the Jones farm. In his report on the failed operation, the division commander explained his actions: "I concluded not to make a determined assault, which, if successful, would have been with such heavy loss that no further attack could have been made successfully... The division was withdrawn during the night and assumed the position it [had taken] the previous night."<sup>618</sup>

Back at Battery Forty-Five, the soldiers of the Twenty-Seventh, in company with the remainder of Cooke's Brigade and MacRae's battered regiments, passed a quiet night

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<sup>618</sup> Hess, 266-67; Trudeau, 215; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 477.

made miserable by a continuing cold drizzle. The next morning, word arrived that Federal troops were once again on the move towards the Confederate lines defending the Boydton Plank Road. With only two brigades of Heth's Division currently holding those defenses, the situation looked grim. Rushing southwest along the Boydton and Duncan roads, MacRae's troops, with Cooke's Brigade bringing up the rear, arrived just in time to thwart the attack by Gershom Mott's Division of the Union Second Corps, sent by General Meade to reinforce Parke and Warren. According to General Heth, "General MacRae reached his works [near the Hart house] just in time to repel the advancing enemy." Falling in on MacRae's left, Davis and Cooke's brigades took cover behind slight earthworks immediately south of Duncan Road and awaited any further enemy attack. Having failed in their frontal assault against MacRae's Brigade, Mott's troops moved to the right with a view of flanking his defenses. In his report, Heth recalled: "Davis and Cooke were now ordered into position on MacRae's left. The enemy was evidently well informed of the extent of the works MacRae occupied and made their dispositions to turn his left but, in their attempt, struck Davis' Brigade and were easily repulsed." Realizing the strength of this final Confederate line, Warren, Parke and Mott called off any further attacks and slowly withdrew their men to the east where they quickly dug in on a new line running from Fort Wadsworth to Peebles farm. As on October 1, Cooke's Brigade had been present on the field but had not been called upon to do any serious fighting. That night and into the following days, the officers and men of

the regiment gradually improved their earthworks in expectation of another Federal attack against the Boydton Plank Road.<sup>619</sup>

Grant's Fifth Offensive, as the joint operation would come to be known, had been partially successful. The Army of the James had secured a lodgment in the Richmond defenses and although the Fifth and Ninth corps had failed to capture the Boydton Plank Road, they had succeeded in extending their siege lines even further to the south and west, thereby forcing Robert E. Lee to extend his own defenses, a move which gradually weakened the already heavily outnumbered Army of Northern Virginia. Casualties for the four-day operation were high for both sides but continued the now common loss ratio of two to one in favor of the Confederates. Overall, Federal losses numbered more than 6,300 while Lee lost nearly 3,000 men. Playing a very limited role in combat operations during the three-day fight south of the James, Cooke's Brigade suffered few casualties. Confirmed losses within the Twenty-Seventh amounted to two men killed, one mortally wounded, and two captured. First Lieutenant James Graham of Company G believed that the regiment's losses were considerably higher. In a letter to his mother dated October 6 he recalled: "Our Reg't has lost very few men in this late fuss—not more than twenty at most and my company has lost none at all." By contrast, MacRae's Brigade, which bore the brunt of the October 1 attack, suffered approximately 137 casualties.<sup>620</sup>

In commenting on the outcome of this latest Union offensive, many in the regiment believed that the Army of Northern Virginia had thwarted the enemy once again. In the same letter quoted above, James Graham stated: "Old Grant has been

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<sup>619</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 477-78; Hess, 263-69; Trudeau, 216.

<sup>620</sup> Wagstaff, 194; Hess, 269; Trudeau, 216-17; Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

kicking up a fuss for a few days past, but I don't think he has gained anything by it; at least on this side of the river and the little that he did gain on the north side of the James I don't think amounts to much." Having been only slightly but successfully engaged against this supposedly large Federal effort, Private Thompson confidently wrote to his mother: "The enemy made a move to our right as if they were trying to flank us, we went round to meet them but they went back...The yankees are very quiet now. They haven't made any further attempt to force our lines or flank us since last Sunday. They found out that we had more troops here than they thought."<sup>621</sup>

"From October 2 until October 27, 1864, my division was kept at work, assisted by Major-General [Wade] Hampton's Cavalry Corps, constructing breastworks from the Harmon Road to Hatcher's Run," recalled General Heth. For the first time in months, the entire division was reunited and working toward a single goal: defending the Boydton Plank Road from further Union attack. Following the Battle of Peebles Farm, Lee realized the inadequacy of his Boydton Plank Road defenses and ordered Hill's Third Corps to construct a permanent line of strong earthworks running parallel with the roadway all the way from Battery Forty-Five to the banks of Hatcher's Run, a distance of about six miles. In addition to Heth's infantrymen and elements of Hampton's cavalry, part of Wilcox's Division was also involved in this massive construction project, which

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<sup>621</sup> David Thompson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, October 8 and 9, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 194.

lasted well into the winter months and resulted in one of the strongest lines of fortifications constructed during the war.<sup>622</sup>

Throughout October, Cooke's Brigade and the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina worked at strengthening the fortifications and picketing the largely open ground between their lines and the enemy, whose own powerful earthworks lay roughly one mile away. Glad to be away from the confining nature of Petersburg's immediate defenses, Lieutenant Graham wrote: "We have at last been relieved from the monotonous and tiresome duty of the trenches immediately in front of Petersburg and are now about four or five miles from the town." Writing to his mother on October 9, in an addition to his previous letter, Private Thompson commented, "We are now strengthening our works." About the middle of the month, Major Joseph C. Webb, having mostly recovered from his May 6 wound, returned to command of the regiment. On the twentieth, Webb commented on the location of the regiment and on the strength of the earthworks that his soldiers now manned:

My Regt. is in the trenches about 5 miles south of Petersburg, between the Weldon and South Side Railroad, rather more comfortably situated than they have been for some time, they having been relieved from the trenches in the city where they had been for 32 days only a few yards from the Enemy, subjected to a furious shelling and musket firing night and day. We are on a comparatively quiet part of the line several hundred [yards] from the Enemy, and have but little annoyance from the skirmishers, only one man wounded at this place. We are daily expecting the Enemy to make their grand assault on our lines. We are well prepared for them with a most formidable line of Earthworks with Stockades and abatis in front—

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<sup>622</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 479; A. Wilson Greene, *Breaking the Backbone of the Rebellion: The Final Battles of the Petersburg Campaign*, (Mason City, IA: Savas Publishing Company, 2000), 11; Hess, 270.

and better than all, tho not as many as we could wish, a formidable array of stout confident hearts to defend them.<sup>623</sup>

As the month of October continued, the men of Cooke's Brigade found themselves shifted ever further to the right, from the vicinity of the Hart house and the intersection of the fortifications with Duncan Road, towards Hatcher's Run, which the division reached by the end of the month. During these weeks, only MacRae's Brigade and various cavalry units were posted to Cooke's right, anchoring the right flank of the Army of Northern Virginia on the north bank of the sluggish stream. James Graham later remembered: "Our brigade occupied the right of our lines, being moved still further to the right as the lines were extended to meet the movements of the enemy, and other troops put in to fill the vacancy until we reached Hatcher's Run." Echoing Graham's words, Sergeant Maides recalled this period of movement with a great sense of pride: "During Sept. and Oct. Grant was pushing his lines southward and Cooke's foot cavalry was engaged in heading him off and keeping him from getting possession of our R. roads."<sup>624</sup>

As they moved south, the troops continued to improve the defenses at each stop, gradually transforming them from mere breastworks into the formidable line described by Major Webb. These defenses consisted of a continuous log and earthen parapet, usually six feet high, at least four feet thick at the top and up to twelve feet at the base, fronted by a ditch or moat often six feet deep and eight feet wide. Embrasures, or openings for artillery, were interspersed along the line and permanent battery positions laid out. Any

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<sup>623</sup> Wagstaff, 194; David Thompson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, October 9, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Hickerson, 76.

<sup>624</sup> Clark, 448-49; Hess, 263, 270; Joseph F. Maides, Petersburg, Virginia, to his mother, Jones County, North Carolina, October, 1864, Joseph F. Maides Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Sloan, 107.

openings in the fortifications, which allowed Confederate pickets to come and go, were protected by traverses and covered by enfilade fire. Fronting the main line were multiple rows of abatis and other obstructions meant to slow any attacker while artillery and musketry fire ripped the enemy apart and stopped the assault. In constructing these earthworks, the men of the Twenty-Seventh used whatever tools that were available but were also forced to use bayonets, tin cups and bare hands when enough picks and shovels could not be requisitioned as these were in high demand throughout the Army of Northern Virginia during this time. When not on labor detail, the troops were sent out on picket duty and occasionally clashed with their Federal counterparts, though there were few if any casualties reported within the regiment during this time. The Confederate picket line was located several hundred yards in front of the main line of fortifications and initially consisted of individual posts built to provide several soldiers with good defensive cover. Later in the year, as the main parapet was continually strengthened, the picket line was also built up into a strong continuous line of earthworks fronted by forward rifle pits and several layers of abatis.<sup>625</sup>

These new defenses were put to the test in late October when Grant launched yet another offensive against the Boydton Plank Road in the hopes of winning a victory that would help President Abraham Lincoln's chances for re-election. On the morning of October 27, Major General Winfield Hancock's Second Corps, supported by elements of the Fifth and Ninth corps, set out from its camps and crossed Hatcher's Run south of the Confederate earthworks. The strike force reached the intersection of the Boydton Plank

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<sup>625</sup> Greene, *Breaking the Backbone of the Rebellion*, 83-84, 98, 354; Hess, 270.

Road and White Oak Road by early afternoon, allowing Hancock to cut Lee's main line of supply from the south. The Confederates reacted quickly to this threat. General Heth pulled MacRae and Davis' brigades out of their earthworks and sent them south, Davis to the point where the Boydton road crossed Hatcher's Run near Burgess' Mill, and MacRae's troops to another crossing of the stream nearer to the main line fortifications. Upon their arrival, MacRae's men were joined by two brigades from William Mahone's Division and prepared to attack across Hatcher's Run.<sup>626</sup>

Meanwhile, Cooke's Brigade was called upon to spread its line to the right and occupy the vacant front previously held by MacRae's troops and some of Wade Hampton's cavalymen under Brigadier General James Dearing. According to General Heth's report, "General [John Rogers] Cooke was ordered to move by the right flank down the works and relieve [General] Dearing...Colonel Mayo, commanding Archer's and Walker's Brigade, was ordered to close in on Cooke's [left]." As they moved south, Cooke's troops were subjected to a heavy fire of musketry, perpetrated by skirmishers from the Fifth Corps, which pressed closely against the Confederate defenses in order to create a diversion for Hancock's main attack. In describing the movements of the Twenty-Seventh to the south, James Graham stated: "October 27, the enemy attempting to turn our right flank again, we moved still further to the right, having to march [for] two miles behind our breastworks half bent, in order to keep out of view of the enemy's sharpshooters who were within seventy-five yards of our works [as the Federals now occupied the all but abandoned Confederate picket line], and made it almost certain death

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<sup>626</sup> Hess, 270-71; Trudeau, 218-37; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 479-81; Sloan, 107.

for any man to show his head above the works.” After shuffling along behind the defenses for nearly two miles, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh took position on the right of the brigade and participated in a lively skirmish with the enemy sharpshooters to their front for the better part of the afternoon and evening. Casualties for this action are unknown, but at least one soldier from the regiment, Private Aretas Turner of Company D, was severely wounded in the spine and partially paralyzed from the waist down.<sup>627</sup>

While the soldiers of Cooke’s Brigade engaged the enemy’s skirmishers and kept a watchful eye out for a Union attack on their lines, Heth and Mahone launched their counterattack against Hancock’s lodgment to the south of Hatcher’s Run. Heth left the actual attack up to Mahone, who led William MacRae’s North Carolinians and Colonel David Weisiger’s Virginians across the stream at 4:30 p.m. Utilizing a dam as a rudimentary bridge, the two brigades were able to cross Hatcher’s Run and quickly advance up the bluff on the south bank. Pushing out into an open field, the attack hit the angle in Hancock’s line, routing one Union brigade and capturing two guns before Federal reinforcements arrived to halt any further progress down the line. Eventually counterattacked from two directions, MacRae and Weisiger’s troops were pushed back across the stream before rallying on the north bank. General Heth reported: “General Mahone was unable to follow up the advantage he had gained for want of adequate force. MacRae and Weisiger in regaining their positions, lost heavily in prisoners, which, from

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<sup>627</sup> Clark, 449; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 481; Jordan and Manarin, 45; Trudeau, 219, 227, 230-32, 236, 244; *Compiled Service Records, Twenty-Seventh Regiment of North Carolina Troops*, microfilm, State Archives, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

the overwhelming force of the enemy, and the scattered condition of the men, was unavoidable.” Confederate casualties for this failed attack were extremely heavy. MacRae’s Brigade alone lost more than 450 men, most of them captured. Luckily for Heth and Mahone, Hancock’s attempts to cross Hatcher’s Run by way of the Boydton Plank Road Bridge early that evening were foiled by Joseph Davis’ Mississippi Brigade. Darkness largely brought an end to the fighting.<sup>628</sup>

During the night, Heth arranged for a continuation of the attack in the morning. MacRae’s battered brigade was pulled back and sent to relieve Cooke’s troops, who were now ordered to leave the earthworks and proceed to the west along Hatcher’s Run to Burgess’ Mill where they would join up with Davis’ Brigade. It was Heth’s intention to attack across the stream with Cooke and Davis’ brigades while Wade Hampton attacked from the west with his cavalry along the White Oak Road on the south side of the watercourse. Captain John Sloan of Company B described the situation that confronted the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina and the rest of Cooke’s regiments that night:

Our brigade was moved up the creek (Hatcher’s Run) as far as Burgess’ Mill, and was placed in position to be ready on the next morning to charge the enemy from their position on the other side of the creek. The only means of crossing the stream was a narrow country bridge, which was guarded by their sharpshooters, and beyond on the hills, about one hundred yards off, was posted their artillery. The charge was to be made at daylight; and with this pleasant prospect before us, you may imagine we passed a comfortable night in anticipation.

Upon their arrival at Burgess’ Mill, according to Private David Thompson, “We went into position and laid down to wait until come light. When light came we were agreeably surprised to here from our pickets that the yanks had fallen back.” Facing an

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<sup>628</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 482-83; Hess, 271-76; Trudeau, 245-47.

undetermined number of Confederates and having failed to cross Hatcher's Run, Hancock was ordered to pull his corps back by the morning of October 28. Warren's Fifth Corps and Parke's Ninth were likewise pulled back from their advanced positions during the day and redeployed to their original lines south of Petersburg between the vicinity of Peebles farm and Fort Wadsworth.<sup>629</sup>

Grant's Sixth Offensive had achieved little and resulted in heavy Union casualties. Hancock's Second Corps had lost over 1,000 men while the Fifth and Ninth corps contributed at least another 500 casualties. In addition, a planned demonstration by Benjamin Butler's army north of the James, which was meant to be only a minor operation, had instead turned into a failed frontal assault that resulted in the loss of more than 1,600 additional Union casualties. Altogether, the two-front offensive had cost Lee some 1,300 men, once again less than half of Grant's total loss. Losses in Cooke's Brigade are unknown but the brigade's actions were highly commended by General Heth. In his official report of the operation, the division commander stated: "Cooke's Brigade deserves to be specially mentioned for the coolness and soldierly manner which distinguished them on this day." On October 27, Cooke's relatively small brigade had been required to defend more than one mile of earthworks against elements of the entire Union Fifth Corps. Under a severe fire for much of the day, the soldiers of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina had coolly manned their posts and maintained their positions, all the while putting up an equally heavy and continuous fire of musketry, which resulted in

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<sup>629</sup> Sloan, 107-108; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 483; David Thompson, on the lines 6 miles S.W. of Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, October 29, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Hess, 276; Clark, 449; Trudeau, 248-51.

numerous casualties within Warren's ranks and may have helped convince the Fifth Corps commander not to press his huge numerical advantage with a full-out assault. On the morning of October 28, faced with the daunting prospect of charging across a small bridge into the teeth of Federal musketry and artillery fire, Cooke's troops were nevertheless prepared to attack when the enemy were found to have vacated their front. In the days ahead, the Twenty-Seventh and the rest of Cooke's Brigade were ordered back to the Boydton Plank Road defenses, this time occupying the extreme right of the division, their right flank resting on the north bank of Hatcher's Run. Here they continued improving their earthworks and awaited orders to move into winter quarters.<sup>630</sup>

Any boost in Confederate morale brought about by the series of Union failures outside of Petersburg and Richmond during the summer and fall of 1864 was more than offset by serious reverses on other fronts. The capture of Mobile Bay in early August, the fall of Atlanta in early September, and the gradual defeat of Jubal Early's army in the Shenandoah Valley in September and October signaled catastrophe for the Southern cause. These Union victories greatly improved sagging Northern morale and all but assured the re-election of President Lincoln, thereby ensuring that the Federal war effort would continue to ultimate victory. Lee's hope that Early could draw off large numbers of Union troops from his front had partially succeeded, but with time his army, as well as the vitally important Shenandoah, was simply swallowed up in a sea of Federal reinforcements. At the same time, Lee could do little to change the situation at Petersburg. Grant's vastly superior numbers and the sheer length of the Confederate

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<sup>630</sup> Trudeau, 247-54; Hess, 276-77; Clark, 449-50; Sloan, 108; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 484.

defenses forced the Confederate commander to merely conform to the enemy's movements.<sup>631</sup>

From their position in the defenses southwest of Petersburg, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh commented on the dismal situation facing the Confederacy but also evinced a spirit of continued determination. Writing to his mother at home in Jones County, Sergeant Joseph Maides, a deeply religious man, stated: "Our forces in the valley have suffered a defeat...this together with the defeat in Georgia begins to make things look rather gloomy on our side. But there is hope yet if we only do our duty and put our trust in the lord." Indeed, despite the bad news from almost every quarter, the relatively stable situation around Petersburg and Richmond as well as the troops' continued belief in themselves and in the abilities of General Lee combined to keep the men in relatively good spirits. Following his return to command in mid October, Major Joseph Webb commented on the morale of the regiment and the army: "I have never seen our soldiers more ready to meet the enemy, or more confident of success...I am so proud of our Brigade, and particularly of my Regt. Cooke's Brigade stands higher among the soldiers of this army than any other in it. The citizens of Petersburg and vicinity are profuse in their praises." Negating the size of the Union army opposed to them, Private David Thompson likewise evinced a strong determination to continue fighting: "The troops are in good spirits and confident of victory if the yanks bring any thing like equal numbers against us, we call two or three to one an equal number." Evincing the soldiers' continued belief in General Lee, on October 6 James Graham wrote: "I think that Grant

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<sup>631</sup> McPherson, 751-80; Kennedy, 313-23.

will make some desperate attempts to do something during this month and before the end of this campaign, but I am in hopes that “Mars Bob Lee” will be more than enough for him wherever he shows himself.”<sup>632</sup>

Possibly the most important reason for continued optimism lay within the past; many Southern soldiers had suffered through three years of war and seen many of their friends and relatives killed or maimed, all in the name of Southern independence. Despite the present dismal outlook of Confederate fortunes, as well as the re-election of Lincoln to the White House in early November, many continued to believe that, given the great sacrifices of the previous three years, it was simply unacceptable and utterly impossible for the war to end in Confederate defeat. In the same letter quoted above, Sergeant Maides gave vent to the feelings of many Confederate veterans at this stage of the war:

This is certainly the most cruel war that has ever been waged and instead of getting better it gets worse every day it lasts. I have been clinging to the hope all the time that there would be some way of settling the war this winter. But I see no hope but 4 years more of bloodshed and war as things stand at this time. The south has but too many of its noble sons to ever peacefully submit to a black republican form of government and be striped of its property and rights and shown no privileges whatever. The soldiers are all tired of the war and would be glad for it to end but then they are for its ending on honorable terms or none.<sup>633</sup>

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<sup>632</sup> Joseph F. Maides, Petersburg, Virginia, to his mother, Jones County, North Carolina, September 23, 1864, Joseph F. Maides Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Hickerson, 76; David Thompson, Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, October 8, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 195.

<sup>633</sup> Joseph F. Maides, Petersburg, Virginia, to his mother, Jones County, North Carolina, September 23, 1864, Joseph F. Maides Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; McPherson, 804-806.

During the month of November, Cooke's Brigade remained behind the Boynton Plank Road defenses with its right resting on Hatcher's Run. In addition to continually improving their earthworks and conducting picket duty, the men were kept busy drilling and preparing for another winter. According to one officer, "Returning to our position on the left of Hatcher's Run, a mile and a half below Burgess' Mill, we remained quiet, performing picket duty and drilling." With the Federal lines nearly one mile distant, there was little chance for a major engagement during the month, although several minor skirmishes did erupt along the picket lines. Apparently, despite the troops' high state of readiness and proven worth in numerous recent battles, the level of discipline within the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina had slipped slightly during this time, possibly the result of the heavy casualties, particularly among the officers, which had been inflicted upon the regiment in recent months. Upon resuming command of the regiment, Major Joseph Webb stated: "I have been quite uneasy since my return regulating everything about the Rgt., which I found in rather a loose condition (a natural consequence of a regt., being commanded by a Captain, however efficient he may be.) As I expect soon to be Col of the Regt., I am anxious that it should keep up its reputation." The daily routine of drill, parade and inspection, instituted by the major did keep the men busy and gradually improved the regiment's competence at drill, slowly bringing the troops back up to their previous levels of excellence despite the presence of numerous conscripts within the ranks. Hinting at the amount of activity going on within the camp in a rather roundabout fashion, James Graham, recently promoted to captain of Company G, wrote his mother on November 16: "This is the day set apart by President Davis as a day of public worship

and we will have no drill or military duties of any sort until Parade this afternoon.” Not since the previous winter had the officers and men of Cooke’s Brigade had the free time or open space for regular drill sessions.<sup>634</sup>

The rather monotonous duty performed by the troops during October and November was made slightly more enjoyable by the presence of the Twenty-Seventh’s Regimental Band, which regularly serenaded the camp. With the possible exception of the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina’s Moravian Band, it was considered one of the best musical organizations in Hill’s Third Corps. Writing to his aunt, Major Webb recalled: “I have enjoyed a rich treat in the way of music since my return. Independent of the many bands of our Army, I can hear very distinctly some very fine bands in the Enemy’s camp, to say nothing of our own Regimental band, which is given up as the best in our Division. They serenaded me the night I returned, and I thought it was the best music I ever listened to.”<sup>635</sup>

As the nightly temperature continued to drop and frost began to appear more often, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh wondered when they would receive orders to go into winter quarters and commented about their supplies of clothing. Throughout the spring, summer and fall, the troops had apparently been adequately clothed and equipped, as there were few complaints from the ranks about a lack of clothing. The possible exception was shoes, which simply wore out faster than they could be replaced. Now, with winter approaching, supplies of uniforms, underclothing,

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<sup>634</sup> Clark, 450; Hickerson, 77; Wagstaff, 197; Joseph F. Maides, Petersburg, Virginia, to his mother, Jones County, North Carolina, November, 1864, Joseph F. Maides Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Hess, 277.

<sup>635</sup> Hickerson, 77.

shoes and blankets once again abounded in the regiment. Any previous shortages, which were primarily due to transportation problems and the constant movement of the troops, were greatly alleviated now that Cooke's Brigade was largely stationary behind the Hatcher's Run earthworks. As throughout the previous two years, supplies of uniforms, shoes, underclothing, and blankets were provided directly to the troops by the state of North Carolina. This main source was occasionally supplemented by extra clothing sent to the soldiers by family and friends back home. On November 23, Captain Graham, who only recently had asked for his mother to organize the Hillsboro Ladies Aid Society to knit gloves for his company, stated: "Our men are, as a general thing, comfortably clad, but need blankets. We hope however to get a full supply of blankets to-morrow or next day and then we will be fixed for the winter." Writing to his mother later in the month, Private David Thompson commented on the improved situation: "I have got a sufficient lot of winter clothing now all but socks, you may send me another pair. I drew a good heavy blanket and over shirt yesterday." In another letter home, written on December 3, Graham mentioned, "Our men are all pretty comfortably clad now as we drew a lot of clothing a few days ago, but some of them are needing shoes. We hope however, to get a lot of shoes in a few days now." The abundance of clothing and blankets during the winter was so prolific in some companies, particularly Company G, that several soldiers mentioned sending "extra" blankets and jackets home for safe keeping.<sup>636</sup>

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<sup>636</sup> Wagstaff, 197-98; David Thompson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, November 29 and December 23, 1864, and February 25, 1865, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

The men's rations were also improved during this time. Throughout the summer months, food supplies, like uniforms, had been haphazardly issued, again largely due to shortages of transportation and the constant movement of the troops. Now, with the situation around Petersburg and Richmond stabilized for the foreseeable future, the men's daily rations, largely consisting of corn meal and bacon, were apparently improved in both quantity and quality, the soldiers even receiving small amounts of liquor to help ward off the chill. Writing to his mother in early November, Captain Graham commented, "We are getting pretty good rations now and have received one ration of brandy this week. It is the second time I have seen liquor issued as rations since we left Ft. Macon, but I understand they will issue it again to-day, but I don't think we will get any more soon." Despite the improvements, both officers and men still relied on those at home to supply them with extras, particularly vegetables. Writing on November 29, Private Thompson, having just received a box of "goodies" from home, stated: "This box is the best one I believe I ever got from home. Tell Mrs. Allison and Mr. McDay that I am very much obliged to them for the turnips and cabbage they sent me they are the nicest that I have seen. We have been living high for the last 5 or 6 days."<sup>637</sup>

The long anticipated move into winter quarters was ordered sometime in mid-November. Having been only partially sheltered under canvas tenting of varying shapes and sizes for some time now, the orders were quickly and jubilantly obeyed.<sup>638</sup> Using the

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<sup>637</sup> David Thompson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, November 29, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 196.

<sup>638</sup> In his letter of October 8, 1864, Private Thompson mentioned sharing a "shelter tent" with 3 or 4 other soldiers. It must have been either a tent fly or a captured Federal shelter tent set up low to the ground to accommodate that number of men; David Thompson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson,

building skills learned during the previous winter, the men of the Twenty-Seventh went to work with a will and quickly constructed dozens of comfortable winter huts located close behind the main line earthworks. While the men felled trees and worked on their cabins, cold and wet weather set in with a vengeance. According to a November 23 letter by Captain Graham, “We are having a quiet but cold time up here now. It rained for nearly three days, but cleared up night before last and since then has been terribly cold. The ground has not thawed at all today and is freezing still harder to-night.” These conditions drove the men to finish their quarters as quickly as possible. On November 29, Private Thompson proudly informed his mother: “We have been busily building winter quarters, we have got them nearly done, my mess will move into our house today, we have a very comfortable log hut.” Writing a few days later, Thompson, recently promoted to the rank of Fourth Corporal of Company G, commented, “we are very comfortably fixed up. Four or six of us stay in a house.” Once again, life for the officers of the regiment was still more comfortable. Writing in early December, Graham wrote: “We have built our Winter Quarters and are very comfortably fixed up. Maj. Webb, Capt. Sloan from Greensboro and myself have a house together and expect to have a fine time this winter...Everything is perfectly quiet along our lines and I hope it may remain so.”<sup>639</sup>

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Orange County, North Carolina, October 8, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>639</sup> Sloan, 108; Wagstaff, 197-200; David Thompson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza and Mary Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, November 29 and December 4, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Hess, 277.

Contrary to Captain Graham's hopes, that fine time was abruptly interrupted on December 8. Despite the advance of winter and the rapidly deteriorating road conditions, Ulysses S. Grant decided on one more offensive push before his armies were forced into winter quarters. The Weldon Railroad was still intact from Stony Creek Station south, allowing Lee's army to continue receiving supplies from that quarter, via the Boydton Plank Road. Grant wanted this supply line shut down for the winter. A strike force was quickly put together consisting of the entire Fifth Corps, still commanded by Major General Gouverneur Warren, one division of the Second Corps, and a single cavalry division under Brigadier General David Gregg. Altogether, this force numbered over 20,000 men. Warren's mission was to march south along the railroad, tearing up track all the way to the town of Hicksford, only ten miles from the North Carolina border. The Federal raiding force got underway on December 7 and was quickly discovered by General Wade Hampton's Confederate cavalry. Hampton's riders skirmished with the enemy cavalry near Stony Creek on the eighth before continuing south and taking up a strong blocking position on the south side of the Meherrin River near Hicksford. Meanwhile, Robert E. Lee learned of the enemy movement and ordered General A.P. Hill to counter the Federal threat to his supply lines. Hill quickly organized his own strike force consisting of elements from all three of his divisions, including Cooke and MacRae's brigades of Heth's Division.<sup>640</sup>

After being relieved by elements of Major General John Brown Gordon's Second Corps, only recently returned to Petersburg from the Shenandoah Valley, the men of

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<sup>640</sup> Trudeau, 262-72; Hess, 279; Sloan, 108.

Cooke's Brigade left their winter quarters on the evening of December 8 and took up the line of march for Dinwiddie Court House, the point of convergence for Hill's troops. Whereas the previous few days had seen relatively clear and pleasant weather, winter set in with a fury as the brigade moved south. Captain Sloan described the night march: "We quit our comfortable quarters, and in the sleet and driving snow, marched until 2 o'clock a.m. of the 9<sup>th</sup>, when we bivouacked till morning." Joining with the rest of A.P. Hill's force about three miles south of Dinwiddie Court House, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina continued their march all day on the ninth, once again subjected to brutal weather conditions and abysmal roads. According to James Graham's post war history of the regiment, "The weather was bitter cold and that night it snowed and sleeted, making the marching very rough." In his report for December 9, Heth recalled "crossing Nottoway River at Wyatt's Mill and bivouacking about eight miles from Belfield, a station on the Weldon Railroad." The van of Hill's column continued on towards Hicksford, amid a heavy ice storm, only to discover that the enemy force had already withdrawn from their advanced positions. Facing a strong Confederate cavalry force across the Meherrin River and with his men also suffering from the severe weather, Warren decided to call off the offensive and ordered his troops to begin their return march on the morning of December 10.<sup>641</sup>

The morning of the tenth found Heth's two brigades on the road to Belfield, not yet informed of the enemy's retreat. "When we came within a few miles of Belfield," according to Captain Graham, "we found that the enemy had retreated and we were

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<sup>641</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 487; Sloan, 108; Clark, 450; Hess, 279; Trudeau, 270-78.

ordered back to Jarrett's Station to try and intercept them." Jarrett's lay about halfway between Hicksford and Stony Creek and it was hoped by General Hill that Heth's troops could reach the railroad before all of Warren's force passed by, giving the remainder of the Confederate infantry and cavalry to the south time to catch up with and hopefully overwhelm the Union rear. General Heth described his orders for December 10 as follows: "Orders were received about 10 o'clock a.m. to move to Jarratt's Station and attack the enemy, if found at that point. Major-General Wilcox's Division was placed under my orders. I was at the same time informed that the Lieutenant-General commanding, with Mahone's Division, would strike the railroad about four miles down in the direction of Belfield." Unfortunately for Hill's troops, the Federals were able to retreat more rapidly than their pursuers had imagined, meaning that the planned Confederate pincer movement failed before it even started.<sup>642</sup>

Upon arriving outside of Jarrett's Station, Heth's troops, including the Twenty-Seventh, found only a force of Union cavalry in their front. Captain Sloan, once again in command of Company B, described the resulting engagement: "Pegram's artillery was thrown forward, and our brigade, concealed in the pines, clad with ice and sleet, was thrown into line as support. The enemy were not aware of our presence, and charged upon the artillery. Our skirmishers received the charge. Seeing that the battery was supported, they began to retreat." According to James Graham, "The enemy were driven back without a gun being fired from the line of battle, and as they retreated, we pursued."

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<sup>642</sup> Clark, 450; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 487; Trudeau, 278-82; Hess, 280.

After crossing the railroad, Cooke's troops followed the retreating enemy horsemen for three or four miles before bivouacking for the night near Rowland's farm.<sup>643</sup>

The pursuit continued the next morning as Heth's Division marched eastward in the direction of Sussex Court House and the Jerusalem Plank Road, the enemy's main line of retreat. Before reaching that point, however, it was learned that the Federals had already passed through to the north. The pursuit was called off and the troops ordered back towards Jarrett's Station. General Heth explained: "The enemy having twenty-four hours the start of us, it was impossible to overtake him, the roads passed over by his forces being impossible for artillery and scarcely [passable] for infantry." That afternoon, the officers and men of Cooke's Brigade returned to the vicinity of Wyatt's Mill on the Nottoway River where they bivouacked for the night. The twelfth witnessed another day of hard marching over abysmal roads, the men subjected once again to cold temperatures and freezing precipitation as they made their way back towards Petersburg and the promise of a return to comfortable winter quarters. Following another frozen night with no shelter, this time spent three miles south of Dinwiddie Court House, and another harrowing day's march, the soldiers of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina finally reached their former camp north of Hatcher's Run on the evening of December 13.<sup>644</sup>

In five days, Heth's two brigades had force-marched nearly 100 miles over terrible roads, alternately frozen and muddy, and had been subjected to brutal winter

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<sup>643</sup> Sloan, 108-109; Clark, 450; Hess, 280; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 487-88.

<sup>644</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 488; Clark, 450; Hess, 280; Trudeau, 265, 278-85; Sloan, 109.

weather with little or no shelter. Writing to his mother nearly a week after returning to camp, Captain James Graham complained: "My feet have not yet recovered from the effects of the hard march we took last week and are still very sore." While the troops' exertions left them tired, sore and frostbitten, the fact that they had failed to inflict any appreciable damage on the enemy wore on their minds as well. During this partially successful Union raid, the enemy had managed to tear up sixteen miles of the Weldon Railroad, from Stony Creek all the way to Hicksford, making it that much more difficult for Confederate wagon trains to move supplies from the railroad up to Petersburg. Brigadier General John R. Cooke evinced the disheartened feelings of the troops in a letter to his sister Flora: "I have but just returned from an expedition towards Weldon...Our march was one of much hardship owing to the great severity of the weather and we were visited the further misfortune of feeling we accomplished but very little of what we might have done." Although the Twenty-Seventh suffered no casualties during this five-day ordeal, three men of the regiment, all of them from Company H, deserted their comrades. Perhaps their proximity to North Carolina had prompted this act. Indeed, several soldiers had assumed that they were once again heading back into the "Good Old North State." "When we took the march down the Weldon R.R.," wrote Corporal David Thompson, "it was thought by a good many that we would go on to N.C."<sup>645</sup>

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<sup>645</sup> Wagstaff, 203; John R. Cooke, Petersburg, Virginia, to Flora Stuart, Richmond, Virginia, December 15, 1864, Cooke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia; David Thompson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, December 23, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Hess, 280; Trudeau, 284-85; Jordan and Manarin, 74-82.

“Everything is quiet along our lines and, from the state of the weather I think is likely to remain so for some time.” With these words Captain Graham described the situation behind the Confederate defenses along the Boydton Plank Road in mid to late December. With winter weather setting in and the roads in terrible condition, both armies were resigned to a few months of relative peace. Other than regular picket duty and occasional attachment to work details, the troops occupied themselves with improving their winter quarters and preparing for the Christmas holiday. General Cooke took this opportunity to improve his brigade’s position near Hatcher’s Run, ordering the construction of a series of earthworks on the south bank, thereby protecting the right flank and rear of the main line. In addition, the men of the regiment labored on completing an artillery emplacement northeast of the stream. Corporal Thompson described the soldiers’ activities: “We are not doing much now except throwing up a new line of works in front of our old line, we don’t drill any at all.”<sup>646</sup>

The cold and wet weather made picket duty a miserable experience. Captain Graham related one such stint in a letter to his mother: “I had a most delightful time last Tuesday on picket in the hardest rain I think I ever saw, wading about in mud and water knee deep nearly all day, but what fun is there in a soldier’s life unless he can have some such good times as that now and then.” Back in camp, life was much more agreeable, aside from the fact that the only wood available for cooking was wet pine, which smoked more than it burned. “We have a very good house to stay in,” reported David Thompson,

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<sup>646</sup> David Thompson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, December 23, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 205; Greene, 352-55.

“the logs are nearly 16 feet long, a good chimney a good door with pine straw to sleep on for feathers. Bill Rogers from Chapel Hill is my bedfellow, we have 5 good heavy blankets between us of which we can make a very comfortable bed.” As always, officers possessed much finer accommodations. Writing to his mother, James Graham stated: “We finished adding a second room to our house yesterday and are now very comfortably fixed as we have two rooms, one for a sitting room and the other for sleeping.”<sup>647</sup>

Adding to the spirit of the Christmas season, rumors began circulating about a big holiday feast for the army being planned by the Confederate government and the citizens of Petersburg. “The government is going to give the army a big dinner christmas or new years I don’t know what sort of a dinner it will be but I rather guess that it will to big for a good one.” Corporal Thompson was proven correct when the rumored feast arrived in camp. Instead of the expected cornucopia, the troops were lucky to receive a small amount of meat and a little bread, if anything. The men of the Twenty-Seventh once again looked to their own extra foodstuffs from home to help enliven the holidays and add to their monotonous rations.<sup>648</sup>

As 1864 came to a close, the morale of the Army of Northern Virginia began to slip somewhat. Beset by reverses on nearly every front and faced with worsening news from home, many Confederate soldiers, especially those from Georgia and the Carolinas with loved ones in the path of William T. Sherman’s army, began deserting in large

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<sup>647</sup> Wagstaff, 203, 206; David Thompson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, December 23, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>648</sup> David Thompson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, December 23, 1864, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Power, *Lee’s Miserables*, 229-30.

numbers. The ranks of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina were not impervious to this trend as twenty-nine men were reported as deserters during the month of December. Many of these soldiers were recently arrived conscripts who merely waited until the first opportunity before leaving the ranks. Some went over to the enemy, but most simply headed back home, hoping to avoid any regular or Home Guard detachments along the way. Included in this number, however, were several veterans, men who had joined the regiment back in 1861 and fought through three and a half years of war only to desert their comrades now. During the previous years, a large percentage of deserters from the regiment had ultimately returned to duty after seeing to their families and getting away from the army for a short time. By December of 1864, however, things had changed. The vast majority of these new deserters would never return to the ranks, nor would they be subjected to military justice, as most were able to evade their pursuers, a fact which only encouraged more desertion.<sup>649</sup>

Despite these losses, and the continually bad news coming from all quarters, many in the regiment remained determined and hopeful that everything would turn out for the best. Writing to his mother, Corporal Thompson echoed the feelings of many of his comrades:

It looks like the tide of war has turned against us here of late, especially in the western army...I think our cause looks decidedly dark at this time...but it can turn and it may turn in our favor in a short time and bring us peace. It is a bad job any way you can fix it if we were to establish our independence this generation nor the next one will never live to see the country as well off as it was before this war broke out [but] if the yankees conquer us we will [be] worse than Negroes...I don't want to let any thing that I have written discourage you in the least. I am not disheartened yet

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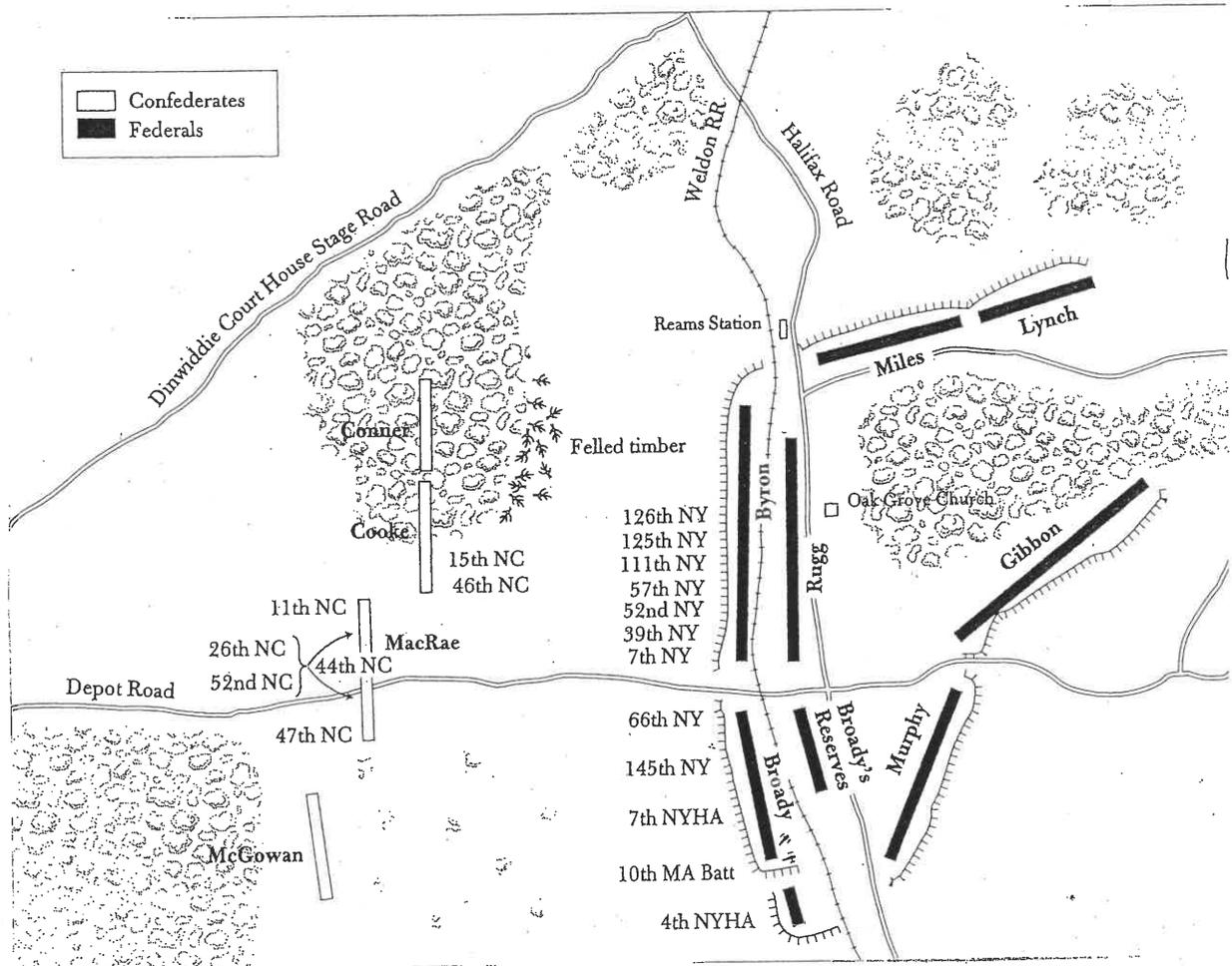
<sup>649</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98; Power, 235-39.

there has been worse things mended. I expect to tuff things out and I think the balance of the Co. will [too].

With the beginning of 1865, it remained to be seen if Robert E. Lee could maintain his army and his position as the rest of the Confederacy crumbled around the still defiant Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>650</sup>

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<sup>650</sup> David Thompson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.



The Battle of Reams Station, August 25, 1864<sup>651</sup>

<sup>651</sup> Hess, 251.

## Chapter 13—January-June, 1865

**“Gen’l Lee inspected my Reg’t very minutely, walking all through the ranks, and then asked me to take them through the Manual of Arms, which I did. After getting through, the old General came up to me, and expressed his gratification and admiration, and said it surpassed anything he expected to see.”**

**- Lieutenant Colonel Joseph C. Webb<sup>652</sup>**

The beginning of 1865 saw the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina maintaining their entrenched position southwest of Petersburg along the banks of Hatcher’s Run. Life in camp remained rather tedious for the troops, as there was little to keep them occupied on a daily basis. Other than regular picket duty, which continued despite the weather, most work details and drill sessions were made impossible by the cold temperatures, frequent rain and snow, and the constant presence of mud, which filled the entrenchments and covered the regiment’s winter camp. Writing to his mother in early January, Corporal David Thompson of Company G wrote, “we have finished our breastworks and it is too bad to drill much so we don’t have much to do but get wood and answer to roll call.” Later in the month, Thompson elaborated on the boredom then afflicting the men of the regiment: “I get almost worn out sitting in camp sometimes nothing new to enliven the mind. It is more weary on Sunday than other days there being no duty to perform except inspection at 9 o’clock after that there is occasionally

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<sup>652</sup> Hickerson, 78.

preaching but today being so cold there was neither...so I have been sitting by the fire all day talking with the boys until we have talked of every thing that we could think of.”<sup>653</sup>

Captain James Graham of Company G and Major Joseph Webb, two of the most astute officers in the regiment, devised one solution to the men’s boredom, schooling. “We are going to establish a school in each Reg’t while we are in Winter Quarters,” wrote Captain Graham, who was destined to do the teaching, “and I hope much good may result from it.” The school was meant to provide illiterate soldiers with a basic understanding of reading and writing. Corresponding with his aunt in late January, Major Webb reported, “Our school will go into operation in a few days. I am having a schoolhouse built. Jimmie Graham is to take charge of it in this Regt. There will be about 150 scholars—some of whom do not know the letters.” The schoolhouse was completed in early February but it is unclear exactly how much Graham was able to teach to the troops before the realities of war descended upon the regiment once again. As a way of providing books for the new school, the regimental band left Petersburg on New Year’s Eve bound for North Carolina. “Our Band starts for North Carolina tomorrow,” wrote Captain Graham on December 30, “to give concerts to raise money to purchase schoolbooks for this Brigade.” Apparently the fundraising scheme was somewhat successful, especially in Orange County. Writing to his aunt, Major Webb related, “To my delight, I had a long letter from Uncle Jno. giving an account of the performances of Our Band, and how they were treated by the good people of Hillsboro....The Band is a

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<sup>653</sup> David Thompson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, January 9 and 23, 1865, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Hess, 281-83; Wagstaff, 206-208.

special pet of mine.” Despite raising money, the absence of the regimental band simply added to the boredom of camp as the familiar and comforting sound of music was temporarily missing from the daily routine.<sup>654</sup>

During the last week of January, Cooke’s Brigade received a new addition, the Fifty-Fifth North Carolina. “The 55<sup>th</sup> Regt. has been added to our Brigade,” reported Corporal David Thompson on February 2, “which makes five Regts. in the Brigade.” Having served previously in Brigadier General Joseph Davis’ Brigade, also of Heth’s Division, the officers and men of the Fifty-Fifth were most likely well known to the troops of Cooke’s Brigade and the Twenty-Seventh Regiment. Coming from a predominately Mississippi outfit, the Fifty-Fifth no doubt felt right at home among the four North Carolina regiments of its new brigade. This addition of a veteran regiment boosted the strength of the brigade and added considerably to its combat effectiveness, which would soon be tested once again.<sup>655</sup>

On February 2, the troops were roused from their winter quarters and assembled for a special occasion. The Twenty-Seventh was presented with a new flag, courtesy of the ladies of Hillsboro. This new banner was most likely a North Carolina state flag or a Confederate Second National as regimental battle flags were issued as military equipment from the Richmond Depot. The event was apparently well attended by a good many ladies including “Mrs. General Cooke.” Corporal Thompson described the presentation

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<sup>654</sup> Wagstaff, 205-208; Hickerson, 77.

<sup>655</sup> Jeffrey M. Girvan, “*Oh the Hard Times We Poor Fellows See:*” *The 55<sup>th</sup> North Carolina in the Civil War*, (M.A. Thesis, East Carolina University, 2001), 208; David Thompson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, February 2, 1865, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

ceremony to his mother: “We had a new flag presented to us today from the Ladies of Hillsboro. Capt. J.A. Graham presented it and Capt. [Robert W.] Joyner [of Company E] received it, both made very pretty speeches. The flag was a very fine one of silk.” If it were indeed a state flag, it probably would have been used on ceremonial occasions and was possibly flown over the regiment’s camp, rather than carried into battle.<sup>656</sup>

The tedious monotony of winter quarters was broken during the first week of February by a surprise Union offensive against the Boydton Plank Road. Annoyed by Robert E. Lee’s continued use of the roadway to haul supplies from the Weldon Railroad at Stony Creek Depot via Dinwiddie Court House and into Petersburg, and taking advantage of a week of relatively pleasant weather, Grant ordered two army Corps, the Second and the Fifth, to interdict this Confederate supply line. The raiding forces, reinforced by one division of cavalry, left their camps on the morning of February 5 and headed west and south, keeping to the north side of Hatcher’s Run until reaching the vicinity of Armstrong’s Mill, just 1,000 yards south of the earthworks manned by Heth’s Division. Upon their arrival, the men of Major General Andrew A. Humphreys’ Second Corps immediately began preparing a series of defensive earthworks while Warren’s Fifth Corps crossed the stream and continued south along with the cavalry. It was Humphrey’s intention to draw any Confederate response to his defenses while Warren and the cavalry outflanked the enemy and struck the Boydton Plank Road several miles

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<sup>656</sup> David Thompson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, February 2, 1865, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 208.

south of Hatcher's Run near Dinwiddie Court House, hopefully doing as much damage as possible to any Confederate wagon trains which happened to be present.<sup>657</sup>

Lee learned of Grant's new offensive around noon on the fifth and quickly dispatched orders to combat it. Heth's Division, reinforced by two divisions of Major General John B. Gordon's Second Corps, those of Brigadier Generals John Pegram and Clement Evans, was charged with stopping the Union thrust against the Boydton Plank Road. To that end, three of Heth's brigades, those of Cooke, MacRae and McComb, were ordered to attack the Union defenses near Armstrong's Mill while the Second Corps advanced down the Boydton Plank Road toward the enemy's main raiding force. Captain James Graham described the hurried preparations for battle within the ranks of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina:

Grant, making another of his forward movements, was within 600 or 800 yards of our works before his movements were seen. Immediately the "long roll" was beaten and we were in line in a few minutes behind our works. About the middle of the day, Davis's Mississippi Brigade, which held a position about a mile to our left was marched down to our position and relieved us. We then started up the line, Cooke's Brigade being in the lead, and after going a mile and a half or two miles, crossed our works and moved to the front.

While the troops of Cooke's Brigade prepared for their role in the developing battle, Union cavalry under Brigadier General David Gregg reached Dinwiddie Court House and quickly captured eighteen supply wagons and about fifty Confederate prisoners, a catch far smaller than expected. Unfortunately for the Federals, this proved to be the only real

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<sup>657</sup> Trudeau, 301, 312-13; Greene, 143-45; Chris Calkins, *History and Tour Guide of Five Forks, Hatcher's Run and Namozine Church*, (Columbus, OH: Blue Gray Magazine, 2003), 8-12.

success of the entire operation, as events would soon dictate the concentration of all available Union strength in the area around Armstrong's Mill.<sup>658</sup>

Emerging from the Boydton Plank Road defenses, Cooke's Brigade was formed into a line of battle facing south and sent out a strong force of skirmishers to feel for the enemy. Heth's battle plan called for Cooke's Brigade to form on the right and McComb's on the left, with MacRae's Brigade held in reserve, ready to exploit a breakthrough. To screen the division's right flank, Heth ordered Cooke's skirmishers, as well as the divisional sharpshooters, to move to the right, leaving only McComb's skirmish line to precede the division's advance. Almost immediately upon moving south, the Confederates ran into the advance skirmishers of Humphreys' Second Corps. According to Captain Graham, "Soon the order to advance was given, and after going a short distance we struck the enemy's skirmish line. The skirmishers in our front gave back through our line, and we had to drive the enemy's skirmishers with our line of battle for more than a mile." This intense skirmishing occupied the men of the Twenty-Seventh for much of the afternoon but resulted in no casualties within the regiment. By a little after 3:00 p.m. Heth's troops had driven in the Federal skirmishers and located the enemy's main line, which consisted of hastily constructed earthworks occupied by two full divisions of the Second Corps and supported by numerous batteries. According to Captain John Sloan of Company B, "we came in view of their line posted on a hill in a field behind earthworks."<sup>659</sup>

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<sup>658</sup> Clark, 450-51; Calkins, *Hatcher's Run*, 14-15; Sloan, 109; Hess, 284; Greene, 145.

<sup>659</sup> Sloan, 109; Clark, 451; Calkins, 14-15; Hess, 284.

In the meantime, upon learning of Warren and Gregg's withdrawal toward Armstrong's Mill, John B. Gordon ordered Evans' Division to coordinate with Heth in his attack on Humphreys' position. Because of the thick foliage and numerous watercourses in the area, it took several hours for the assault troops to get into position. It was nearly 4:00 before everything was ready. The two Confederate divisions were divided by Rocky Branch, a small offshoot of Hatcher's Run, but were otherwise well within supporting distance of each other. Confederate artillery would precede the attack and beginning around 3:45 they unleashed a fury of shot and shell on the Union earthworks. Federal gunners responded by firing upon Heth's battle line, which was visible in the distant tree line across the fields of the Thompson farm, perhaps 500 yards away. At around 4:00, the attack commenced with Cooke and McComb's Brigades pushing out into the open field towards the Union defenses. Just as the attack began, a winter storm arrived over the battlefield, dropping sleet and freezing rain on the combatants. It was quickly discovered that McComb's Tennessee regiments were not conforming to Cooke's left flank. In fact, many of these troops, severely shaken by the Federal artillery, had already broken for the rear by the time the advance began. James Graham described the predicament that the men of Cooke's Brigade now found themselves in: "As we started up the hill and were within sixty yards of their works, the command "Dress to the left," which had been given all the time, was repeated, and finding that the brigade on our left did not come to time we fell back to the edge of the woods and took position behind a fence." Locating McComb's derelict troops, Cooke ordered his brigade to try again. "Again the order to attack was given," related Captain

Graham, "and again starting up the hill, finding that our left was [again] unsupported, we were ordered back."<sup>660</sup>

Cooke's Brigade launched as many as three separate attacks against the Federal defenses, held in this sector by the bulk of Brigadier General Gershom Mott's Division. The failure of McComb's Tennesseans or MacRae's troops to support him doomed Cooke's attacks to failure. Following their final repulse, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, in company with the rest of Heth's Division, fell back several hundred yards until they ran into some of Gordon's troops coming forward. The bulk of Evans' Division remained on the west bank of Rocky Run, but Cook's Georgia Brigade of Bryan Grimes' Division was ordered to back up Heth's troops. Upon their arrival, the Georgians advanced towards the same hill that had rebuffed Cooke's North Carolinians three times. James Graham related an interesting incident which occurred at this time:

When we reached our reserve line, about a half a mile to our rear, we halted, and soon fresh troops were ordered forward, Cooke's Georgia Brigade taking the place of ours. As they advanced, the three left companies of the Twenty-seventh North Carolina (Companies H, G, and B) thinking the command was given by our Brigadier, went forward with them and fought through the remainder of the afternoon, losing several men.

This attack fared no better than those before it. Evans' Division was also repulsed after its three brigades tried and failed to reach the Federal left flank.<sup>661</sup>

After dark put an end to the fighting for February 5, Heth's troops pulled back to the Boynton Plank Road defenses where they spent a cold and miserable night under

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<sup>660</sup> Clark, 451; Sloan, 109; Calkins, 15-16; Greene, 146.

<sup>661</sup> Clark, 451-52; Sloan, 109-110; Trudeau, 315-16; 15-16; Calkins, 15-16.

arms, ready for a continuation of the battle at any moment. The day had witnessed great bravery by the soldiers of Cooke's Brigade and the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina. Unfortunately, nothing whatever was gained by the failed attacks. Casualties within the regiment were mercifully light, one man killed and two wounded. The same could not be said for the rest of the brigade. The Fifty-Fifth North Carolina, for example, lost upwards of twenty-five men while casualties for the other regiments are unknown.<sup>662</sup>

The next day, the fighting largely shifted to the south side of Hatcher's Run, near Dabney's Mill. Here, Evans and Pegram's divisions of the Second Corps engaged elements of Warren's Fifth Corps in a series of attacks and counterattacks while Major General Rooney Lee's cavalry hit the Federal left flank along Vaughan Road, driving Gregg's Union horseman back in confusion. Despite some initial success, Warren's Federals were ultimately pushed back upon the arrival of Confederate reinforcements and the fighting largely died down around nightfall. That morning the men Heth's Division had once again left the cover of their earthworks and formed a battle line outside the works facing south, ready to pitch into the action should Gordon's left flank be threatened by the troops of Humphrey's Second Corps. Captain Graham described the regiment's actions during February 6: "We again moved to the front and formed a line some five hundred yards in front of our works. We lay here in line of battle all day to prevent the enemy from crossing the creek and turning the flank of Gordon's Corps. Although the enemy were very near we had no engagement except a little skirmishing and picket firing." Despite the absence of heavy fighting, the troops of Cooke's Brigade

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<sup>662</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98; Girvan, *The 55<sup>th</sup> North Carolina*, 209.

suffered severely from the elements. As on February 5, sleet and freezing rain once again covered the battlefield and nearly froze the combatants. Darkness brought the day's actions to a standstill and allowed Cooke's Brigade to return to its entrenchments and the comfort of its winter quarters, this time for good.<sup>663</sup>

By February 7, both sides were all but exhausted by the pointless combat and nearly broken down by the weather. Despite some continual skirmishing near Dabney's Mill, the Battle of Hatcher's Run was officially over. During the night, the Federals slowly retraced their steps back to their camps while the Confederates did likewise. Cooke's Brigade had not ventured forth from its earthworks on the seventh. Altogether, the three day battle had resulted in only minor damage to the Confederate supply lines while the fighting accounted for roughly 1,500 Union and 1,000 Confederate casualties. The only tangible Union gain was the extension of their lines three miles to the southwest, to the Vaughan Road crossing of Hatcher's Run. The continuing bad weather made any further Union advance impossible, at least for the time being. Writing to his father on February 8, Private Charles J. Watson of Company G, only recently returned to the army from Point Lookout Prison, described the battle from the perspective of the private soldier: "We had a fight on the 5<sup>th</sup> but I come out safe...we checked the yankees, they were trying to extend there picket line and our authorities didn't want them to do it and on the day after we had our fight...I have been on picket two days and nights and haven't slep a wink."<sup>664</sup>

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<sup>663</sup> Calkins, 16-22; Greene, 146-48; Trudeau, 317-21; Clark, 452; Girvan, 209.

<sup>664</sup> Greene, 149; Calkins, 22-23; Trudeau, 321-22; Charles J. Watson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to his father, Orange County, North Carolina, February 8, 1865, Charles J. Watson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Once back in camp, the soldiers of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina settled back into a routine of picket duty and monotonous boredom. According to Captain Graham, “we enjoyed six weeks of quiet and rest.” It was around this time that the scourge of desertion began having a serious impact on the strength of the regiment and on the entire Army of Northern Virginia. During February alone, eighty-two men left the ranks without authorization, while March witnessed another thirty-one desertions from the Twenty-Seventh. In terms of the army as a whole, it is believed that more than 3,000 men deserted during the four-week period from February 15 through March 18. Many of these soldiers would cross over to Union lines, sign an Oath of Allegiance to the United States, and then wait until it appeared safe to return to their homes. This option was especially practical for those whose loved ones lived within Union occupied territory, particularly along the coastal sections of North Carolina.<sup>665</sup>

The reasons for desertion within the regiment were manifold and complex. By February of 1865, the war was obviously going against the nascent Confederate nation. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia was deadlocked at Petersburg by Grant’s superior numbers, Sherman’s army was heading north through South Carolina, and the port of Wilmington, North Carolina, the primary source of foreign supplies for the Confederate Army, had been closed by Union land and naval forces. In addition, those soldiers with families in eastern North Carolina could not help but worry about the prospect of further Union incursions into the region. Writing to his mother in Jones County in mid February, Sergeant Joseph F. Maides of Company I worried, “I understand there is a great many

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<sup>665</sup> Power, 260-61; Greene, 116-20; Hess, 286; Clark, 452.

forces at New Bern destined for Kinston and Goldsboro which if they are successful will cut off all communications with the eastern part of the state.” Finally, the plight of the people at home, many of whom were threatened with Union occupation and financial ruin, if not outright starvation, often had a great influence on a soldier’s state of mind. In many cases, deserters left the ranks in response to desperate letters from wives or mothers. In commenting on the recent wave of desertion, Captain Graham wrote:

There have been a great many desertions lately, but my company had never had one since the war commenced until one night last week when four of my men deserted to the Yankees...Most of the desertions lately have been caused by letters from home. If the people at home would only write cheering letters to their friends in the army instead of counseling them to commit this base crime everything would go on so much the better with us.

Major Joseph Webb, likewise shocked by the sudden surge of deserters from the regiment, wrote on February 23: “I will not deny that our armies are discouraged and demoralized—by the influence of the people at home...Desertions have become alarming in the Army, and I blush to say, the 27<sup>th</sup> Reg’t is not free from it.”<sup>666</sup>

Sergeant Maides brought up another possible reason for the high rates of desertion in one of his letters home:

Mother, there is every prospect of the arming of negroes [and] making them fight in our army, if they are put in the army they will be on the same footing with the white soldiers will receive the same rations the same clothing and the same pay that the white soldiers get and it is pointedly against the wills of nearly all the soldiers they will not submit to such wrongs and there is but one way they can escape such wrongs and that is to desert which they are doing every night.

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<sup>666</sup> Joseph F. Maides, near Petersburg, Virginia, to his mother, Jones County, North Carolina, February 18, 1865, Joseph F. Maides Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Wagstaff, 211; Hickerson, 77; Power, 255-70.

Indeed, by February of 1865 the debate within the Confederate Government and Army about whether or not to arm blacks, both free and slave, had reached fever pitch.

Although many soldiers were obviously against the measure, others may have seen it as a way of winning the war. With no other appreciable source of new manpower, the government was basically forced to adopt the measure of accepting black soldiers, much to the chagrin of many of its white soldiers. The plan was slow to be implemented, however, and by the fall of Petersburg in early April, only a few companies of black combat troops had been organized.<sup>667</sup>

Maides' harsh reaction against the concept of black soldiers serving in the Confederate Army provides good evidence against the possibility of black troops serving in the ranks of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina at any time during the war. Continuing the letter quoted above, Maides commented: "I did not volunteer my services to fight for a free negroes free country, but to fight for a free white mans free country and I do not think I love my country well enough to fight with black soldiers." Indeed, through researching the regiment's roster, the author has concluded that only two slaves can be confirmed as being present with the regiment during the war, both of them engaged solely as servants. John Gilmer was the body servant of Colonel Gilmer and therefore left the regiment upon his master's wounding at Bristoe Station, while Willie

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<sup>667</sup> Power, 250-55, 268, 310-11; Greene, 114-16; Joseph F. Maides, near Petersburg, Virginia, to his mother, Jones County, North Carolina, February 18, 1865, Joseph F. Maides Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

Murphy followed Captain William Ward of Company I out of the service upon Ward's resignation in April of 1862.<sup>668</sup>

Despite the high rates of desertion within the regiment, many veteran officers and soldiers continued to express optimism for the future of the Confederate war effort and tended to dismiss deserters as nothing but cowardly and degraded individuals lacking in morale integrity and spirituality. Writing to his aunt in early March, Joseph Webb, only recently promoted to lieutenant colonel, was reassuring: "I have learned to look only to our gallant soldiers, and a just God, for deliverance of the Country from the ruin and disgrace that threatens it...In spite of our enemies at home and abroad, we will conquer a peace. Before two months pass, the tide of success will be in our favor. General Lee's Army tho' depleted and discouraged, is not by any means disorganized." Continuing in a similar vein, Captain James Graham of Company G stated to his mother: "We need God's help in this our time of trouble, and I believe that he will yet bring us out of all our trials and enable us to triumph over the Yankees." In describing the deserters from the regiment and the army as a whole, Corporal David Thompson of Captain Graham's company, commented, "I would rather run some risk than quit dishonorably. There are but few of those who leave that are of any account, they are generally of the degraded class."<sup>669</sup>

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<sup>668</sup> Joseph F. Maides, near Petersburg, Virginia, to his mother, Jones County, North Carolina, Joseph F. Maides Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

<sup>669</sup> Hickerson, 78; Wagstaff, 211; David Thompson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, February 25, 1865, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

At some point during February, small details of troops from the Army of Northern Virginia were sent to North Carolina to assist Confederate forces in rounding up deserters and maintaining law and order in the face of Sherman's upcoming invasion of the state. This detachment consisted of the Seventh North Carolina of Lane's Brigade and several individual companies from Cooke's and Grimes' North Carolina brigades. Cooke's five regiments were ordered to detach fourteen companies as part of this force. The Twenty-Seventh's quota included three companies. Aside from Company F, however, the author can find no evidence that any other soldiers from the regiment ever left the Petersburg entrenchments as part of this contingent. Company F, consisting of about twenty men commanded by First Sergeant William Mallory, would remain in North Carolina searching for deserters and helping to maintain law and order in the Greensboro area. They would ultimately join General Joseph E. Johnston's Army of Tennessee in the weeks following the Battle of Bentonville.<sup>670</sup>

During the last days of February, several promotions took place within the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina's officer corps. Major Joseph Webb, having commanded the regiment since October of the previous year, was promoted to lieutenant colonel with the appointment to date from January 11, 1865. George F. Whitfield, still recovering from his severe head wound received at Cold Harbor, was likewise moved up in rank to full colonel, even though it remained to be seen when, or if, he would ever return to the regiment. Finally, Captain Calvin Herring of Company D, the senior company officer present with the regiment, was promoted to the rank of major. First

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<sup>670</sup> Mark L. Bradley, *This Astounding Close: The Road to Bennett Place*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 153, 296; Jordan and Manarin, 7-98; Clark, 462.

Lieutenant George Jones assumed command of Company D. Whitfield and Herring's promotions were likewise ordered to date from January 11, 1865.<sup>671</sup>

Despite severe losses from desertion during the month of February and the detachment of Company F to North Carolina, the strength of the regiment and the brigade as a whole remained relatively stable. Abstracts from a February 25 inspection report specify that Cooke's Brigade numbered over 1,400 officers and men present and accounted for, by far the largest brigade in Heth's Division. Of this number, the Twenty-Seventh contributed at least 300 troops. In addition, nearly 400 men of the brigade were listed as present but not fit for duty, a clear sign that they were either sick or wounded in various local hospitals, detailed elsewhere on detached duty, or temporarily home on furlough. Whatever their status, many of these troops would return to their regiments in a short period of time. In addition to the customary return of sick and wounded soldiers, the Twenty-Seventh received an added boost to its strength between January and March with the return of twenty-six men who had been captured at Bristoe Station in 1863 and spent nearly fifteen months at Point Lookout Prison, only to be exchanged in early 1865. Although some of these men were in no condition to return to duty immediately, most were veterans with several years of experience in the regiment. Although they were not yet accustomed to life in the Petersburg entrenchments, most would take their places alongside their old comrades and quickly catch up on the changes in warfare made since their capture.<sup>672</sup>

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<sup>671</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 8, 39; Hickerson, 78.

<sup>672</sup> U.S. War Department, *OR, Vol. 46, Part I*, 389; Jordan and Manarin, 7-98; The author's estimate of 300 men present for duty with the regiment as of late February was arrived at through an accounting of those

Throughout the early months of 1865, supplies of clothing and food continued to be a primary concern of officers and men alike. In terms of uniforms, shoes and blankets, few men in the regiment appear to have complained of shortages at this stage of the war. On the contrary, one still finds references to “extra” clothing being sent home for safekeeping. In late February, Corporal Thompson of Company G informed his mother that he was sending a jacket home with another member of the company who had managed to receive a furlough. Later, in mid March, Thompson wrote, “I started a box home with 2 blankets and some bottles.” In addition to the common soldiers, officers were also busy lightening their load for the coming campaign season by sending unnecessary clothing home. “I send you my coat which I wish you would have fixed up for me,” wrote Captain Graham to his mother. “I have not sent any clothes home except my new coat and boots and the blue pants. I left them with Father when I was in Richmond last...I have [also] gotten a pair of pants from our Q. M.” As always, when the soldiers could not get something from the state or Confederate governments, whether clothing or food, they asked those at home to supply it to them. Around New Year’s, one company received a special delivery from their home community, a box of gloves sufficient to outfit the entire company.<sup>673</sup>

Supplies of food, on the other hand, were never as efficiently or regularly supplied. By early 1865, the railroads upon which Lee’s army depended for supplies were in a terrible state of disrepair, thanks to Union raids, the onset of heavy rain and

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men who surrendered at Appomattox Court House on April 9 with the addition of those who were killed, wounded, captured or deserted between late February and early April, it remains only an estimate.

<sup>673</sup> David Thompson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, February 25 and March 16, 1865, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wagstaff, 205, 212.

snow, and the ongoing problem of inadequate maintenance. Because of these problems, the troops defending Richmond and Petersburg were often confronted with rations that could be more than adequate one week but decrease to barely sufficient amounts within days. The conflicting accounts of officers and men help explain this situation. On January 18, Captain Graham stated: "I think I am in as good health as I ever was in my life and am growing fleshier every day. If I could only keep on in this way long enough I think I would be as large as a grown man after a while." Just one week later, however, Corporal Thompson noted, "Our rations is pretty short now and we don't get them regular of late. I recon on the account of the bridges washed away on the RR." By mid March, if not before, the situation had begun to reverse itself once again. One reason for the improvement was the replacement of Commissary-General Lucius Northrop with Brigadier General Isaac M. St. John, a much more capable administrator. Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Webb wrote his aunt, "Tis true, the rations we get are sometimes not such as a man with a good appetite could wish for, still we make out with them, and never really suffer for food." The food situation improved still further as the month went on. Writing to his mother on March 16, Corporal Thompson wrote, "[We] have got enough meat now to last a month...also flour and meal." Even at the end of the month, as the Petersburg defenses were beginning to crumble, Private Charles Watson commented, "We are getting a nuff to eat with out the boxes [from home]."<sup>674</sup>

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<sup>674</sup> Wagstaff, 207; David Thompson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, January 23 and March 16, 1865, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Hickerson, 78; Charles J. Watson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to his parents, Orange County, North Carolina, March 27, 1865, Charles J. Watson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Hess, 281; Power, 258-59.

In addition, the officers and men of the regiment apparently received at least some of their back pay during the final months of the war, although inflation made Confederate currency little better than worthless. Writing to his mother on February 18, Sergeant Joseph Maides commented, “we have been paid off this week four months wages, but confederate money is of such little worth that it does not do us much good.” Upon receipt of a rare twenty-day furlough in late March, Corporal Thompson was likewise “furnished with [back] pay to the 31<sup>st</sup> day of October 1864.” As with the issue of clothing and food, it appears that the North Carolina and Confederate governments were doing all in their power to meet the needs of their soldiers right up until the end of the conflict.<sup>675</sup>

The continuation of the conflict was much on the minds of the officers and men of Cooke’s Brigade and the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina by the beginning of March. With the weather becoming more agreeable by the day, drill and preparation for renewed combat became the focus of the troops, greatly alleviating their previous inactivity. In addition, the regimental band, only recently returned from its fundraising drive in North Carolina, enlivened the mood in camp with regular performances. Throughout early 1865 it was believed by many that Cooke’s Brigade was the best drilled and most disciplined unit in the Army of Northern Virginia. According to R.H. Finney, the Adjutant General of Heth’s Division, the division commander had the utmost respect for Cooke’s North Carolinians. In a postwar Richmond newspaper article, Finney recounted

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<sup>675</sup> Joseph F. Maides, near Petersburg, Virginia to his mother, Jones County, North Carolina, February 18, 1865, Joseph F. Maides Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; James A. Graham, “Twenty Day Furlough for Corporal David Thompson, Company G, 27<sup>th</sup> North Carolina,” March 20, 1865, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

a conversation he had had with Heth during the spring of 1865: “[Heth] said that he thought at no time had the United States Army ever been in better condition and discipline than the command of Albert Sydney Johnston in Utah in 1858, and that no portion of that command was in better drill, discipline and general efficiency than the brigade [Cooke’s] above mentioned, just previous to the end of the war.” This praise was well placed and would not be the last kind word awarded to the brigade that spring.<sup>676</sup>

On or around March 15, a drill competition took place between Cooke’s Brigade and the South Carolina Brigade of Brigadier General Samuel McGowan, part of Wilcox’s Division, also of A.P. Hill’s Third Corps. Under the arrangements, both brigadiers selected two of their best regiments for the competition. General Cooke brought along the Fifteenth and Twenty-Seventh regiments, while McGowan chose the Fourteenth South Carolina and another regiment. During the ensuing competition, which took place at General Heth’s headquarters, Cooke’s troops upheld their enviable reputation, defeating the South Carolinians in both drill and inspection. On hand for the occasion were numerous generals including, according to Corporal Thompson of Company G, “Gen. Lee, Gen. Hill, Wilcox, Heth, Bushrod Johnson, Gordon, Grimes, and about all the brigadiers in those above named Maj. Gen.’s commands, also a great many ladies, among the last mentioned was President Davis’ Daughter.” Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Webb jubilantly wrote about the performance of his regiment in a letter home:

A few days ago, Gen’l McGowan, Comdr. of a Brigade of South Carolinians in Wilcox’s Div’n challenged Gen’l Cooke to drill one of his

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<sup>676</sup> R.H. Finney, “Discipline in the Confederate Army,” unspecified newspaper article from Richmond, Virginia, May 29, 1888, found in John R. Cooke’s Scrapbook, John Rogers Cooke Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Greene, 102-103.

Regts. against one of this brigade, as well as contend for which would stand the best inspection of arms, accoutrements, etc. The challenge was accepted, and to the delight of our Brigade, we beat them both on drill and inspection. Gen's R.E. Lee, Heth, Wilcox, Gordon and about 20 brigadiers were present. Afterwards, Gen'l Lee inspected my Reg't very minutely, walking all through the ranks, and then asked me to take them through the Manual of Arms, which I did. After getting through, the old General came up to me, and expressed his gratification and admiration, and said it surpassed anything he expected to see, and then turned to Gen'l Cooke and spoke in the highest terms of the drill of my Reg't, and said he liked the vim and life with which Col. Webb's Reg't drilled, etc.

Unlike Webb's minute summary, Corporal Thompson simply informed his mother, "We had a big drill yesterday against the 14<sup>th</sup> S.C. Regt., we beat them all to pieces on drill also on inspection of arms."<sup>677</sup>

While the soldiers of Cooke's Brigade continued to drill and conduct picket duty, Robert E. Lee made plans to extricate his army from the Petersburg lines. With the gradual improvement in the weather and the rapidly improving road conditions, it was only a matter of time before Ulysses S. Grant's armies began their spring campaign. Meanwhile, Sherman's forces were rapidly advancing through North Carolina, opposed only by a token force commanded by General Joseph E. Johnston. In short, if Lee remained stationary, the Army of Northern Virginia, now numbering around 60,000 men, could soon find itself confronted by nearly 200,000 Federals. Faced with this arithmetic, it was obvious to Lee that something had to be done, and soon. The answer, in part supplied by Major General John B. Gordon, included a "spoiling attack" on the Federal entrenchments outside of Petersburg, which, if successful, would force Grant to shorten

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<sup>677</sup> David Thompson, near Petersburg, Virginia, to Eliza Thompson, Orange County, North Carolina, March 16, 1865, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Hickerson, 78; Greene, 102-103.

his lines and allow Lee to detach a large number of his troops to assist Johnston against Sherman's forces in North Carolina. The target of this attack was Fort Stedman, an earthen fortification only 200 yards opposite from Colquitt's Salient, part of the Confederate lines just east of Petersburg. Under Gordon's plan of attack, his own Second Corps, reinforced by two brigades from Bushrod Johnson's Division and four brigades of A.P. Hill's Third Corps, would carry the enemy works in a surprise assault before dawn on March 25. With Fort Stedman and its supporting batteries captured, the Confederates would then sweep right and left, enlarging the breakthrough, before making a dash for the U.S. Military Railroad, Grant's primary supply artery, which ran just behind Union lines.<sup>678</sup>

Of the four brigades required from the Third Corps, Heth's Division contributed Cooke and McComb's troops to assault force. Captain John Sloan of Company B described the regiment's move to Petersburg: "We received orders, at midnight on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March, to be in readiness to move in the direction of Petersburg. Leaving the sick and wounded [convalescents] to take care of the camp and the lines in our immediate front, we began our march, not knowing the cause of this seeming untimely order." Upon their arrival in the city, following a rapid march of two hours, the soldiers of Cooke's Brigade bivouacked near the water-works and waited for further orders. As Gordon's troops began the attack about 4:00 A.M., Cooke's Brigade was ordered forward to occupy the now vacant earthworks of Colquitt's Salient. "About daylight," wrote Captain Sloan, "we were quietly marched into our trenches in front of and to the right of

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<sup>678</sup> Greene, 152-57; Trudeau, 333-36; Clark, 452.

Hare's Hill. The troops who had just occupied these trenches where we now were had been marched out...The attack was made in force about daylight."<sup>679</sup>

Despite quickly seizing Fort Stedman and its supporting batteries, Gordon's troops were stalled in their attempts to enlarge the breach. The Federal garrisons of Fort Haskell to the south and Battery IX to the north held their positions against numerous Confederate attacks, inflicting heavy casualties and giving the Federal Ninth Corps, which manned this portion of the lines, time to organize a counterattack. Meanwhile, the detachments sent ahead toward the railroad also ran into unexpectedly stiff Union opposition and were forced back. By 8:00 the Confederate breakthrough had been contained and large numbers of Union troops were in the process of retaking Fort Stedman. Remaining in reserve but under occasionally heavy Union artillery fire, the men of Cooke's Brigade witnessed the entire episode. Captain James Graham wrote:

Soon after reaching the works we saw large bodies of the enemy moving up their line and soon our troops who had charged were driven back, and we learned that the attempt to carry "Hare's Hill" had failed. Our position being just to the right of the troops engaged we had, for the first time during the war, an opportunity of seeing a fight in which we did not take part. The view, at a distance, looks worse than the reality seems while you are actually in it.

The best opportunity for the extrication of Lee's army had now failed. The survivors of Gordon's attack flooded back across the field, harried all the way by Union artillery and musketry fire. In the end, the failed assault resulted in nearly 3,000 Confederate and 1,000 Union casualties and doomed the Confederates to an eventual forced evacuation of

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<sup>679</sup> Sloan, 111; Clark, 452; Greene, 157; Girvan, 211.

Petersburg and Richmond. The only thing in doubt was when Grant would launch his final offensive.<sup>680</sup>

With the Fort Stedman offensive over, Lee ordered Hill's troops back to their earthworks before the Federals comprehended the weakened condition of the Boydton Plank Road defenses. Unfortunately for the soldiers of Cooke's Brigade, elements of Andrew Humphrey's Union Second Corps had already attacked their weakened picket line, capturing it and nearly all of the convalescents charged with defending it. Captain Graham described the predicament now facing the returning troops: "About 2 o'clock p.m. we were ordered back to camp. Before reaching that point, however, we perceived by the firing that there was a fight going on at that point, and on arriving at our camp found the enemy in possession of our picket line. They had charged it in the morning and captured it from our sick and disabled." Quickly sizing up the situation, General Heth ordered McComb's Tennessee Brigade to retake the picket line. Despite a determined defense and heavy Union artillery fire, which pummeled both the attackers and the Confederate main line, McComb's attack was eminently successful and succeeded in recapturing nearly all of the lost rifle pits and trenches. Unfortunately the prisoners taken from Cooke's Brigade were not redeemed.<sup>681</sup>

Later that afternoon, around 4:00 or 5:00 p.m., a heavier force of Federals counterattacked and drove the Tennesseans and Marylanders of McComb's Brigade back before Cooke's picket line was properly established. Responding to this new development, General Cooke reacted quickly. According to Captain Graham, the

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<sup>680</sup> Greene, 157-60; Trudeau, 337-54; Sloan, 111; Girvan, 211; Clark, 452-53; Wagstaff, 213.

<sup>681</sup> Clark, 453; Greene, 162, 177-79; Sloan, 111; Hess, 289; Girvan, 211.

General, “calling out our sharpshooters—100 men—ordered them to move quietly down the bank of the creek [Hatcher’s Run], until they reached the picket line and then to flank it and charge down it. As they raised the yell for the charge, the reserve sharpshooters started from a gap in our works and soon the whole of the picket line of our brigade was again in our possession.” This counterattack, performed with great professionalism by the brigade’s sharpshooter battalion, which included officers and men from the Twenty-Seventh, stabilized the situation until nightfall put an end to the skirmishing. The end of the day found Cooke’s sharpshooters firmly in command of the brigade’s picket line. The same could not be said of the troops to their left, who had largely failed in their attempts to retake the forward rifle pits. This failure, as yet unknown to the men of the regiment, would cause trouble in the days ahead. Altogether, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina suffered twenty-seven casualties on March 25, including one man wounded and twenty-six captured, almost all as a result of the fight for control of the brigade’s picket line. Losses for the rest of the brigade are unknown but they were probably comparable.<sup>682</sup>

Following a relatively quiet night, the sharpshooters of Cooke’s Brigade were relieved by a regular picket detachment under the command of Captain John Sloan of Company B. According to Captain Graham, dawn revealed that “the enemy had established their picket line, during the night, within fifty yards in front of our line, while on our left they were on a line with us, the troops on our left having failed to recapture their picket line.” This faulty alignment caused only minor problems on March 26, but

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<sup>682</sup> Greene, 178-83; Clark, 453; Sloan, 111; Hess, 289-90; Girvan, 211; Wagstaff, 213; Jordan and Manarin, 8-98.

was resolved the next day when the left flank of the brigade's picket line was refused, preventing any enfilade fire from the nearby Union pickets. Writing to his father during this time, Captain Graham commented, "I am on picket to-day with the enemy pretty close to me, but everything is perfectly quiet." This newly fashioned line held up against several Union probing attacks throughout rainy March 30, all of which were repulsed with relative ease, resulting in only minor casualties to both sides. March 31 would witness yet more fighting for control of Heth's picket line along both sides of Hatcher's Run. This time the Federals' huge superiority in numbers assured their ultimate triumph. Facing off against elements of the Union Second and Twenty-Fourth Corps, the latter a part of the Army of the James, Captain Sloan's picket line initially held its ground, but, "after frequent attacks by a large force, our pickets were compelled to yield and fall back to the main line." As on the twenty-fifth, the fighting for control of the picket line did not involve the Confederate's main line of entrenchments but nevertheless resulted in numerous casualties to the men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina and Cooke's Brigade. The regiment lost at least thirty-one men on March 31, including three men wounded and twenty-eight captured, several of whom were likewise wounded.<sup>683</sup>

That night, orders came from General Heth to attempt to recapture the brigade's picket line. General Cooke selected companies G and H from the Twenty-Seventh as well as similar detachments from the other regiments in the brigade for the attack, which began about two hours before daylight. Captain Graham of Company G provided a description of the following action in his postwar history of the regiment:

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<sup>683</sup> Wagstaff, 213; Clark, 453; Sloan, 111-12; Greene, 199, 208, 214, 221-223; Jordan and Manarin, 8-98.

[We] were ordered forward to drive the enemy out of our picket line and take possession of it and hold it. A double line of skirmishers, from another brigade, was in our front when we advanced...what became of [them] we never knew...We found Yankees alone at any point where we struck the line...The other troops who had advanced with us had turned to the right at a little branch [Rocky Branch], about 200 yards back, and only four companies were here present. Soon the fire of six or eight [rifle] pits to the right and left of us was poured in upon us, but in the dark they did but little damage...Finding we had no support, and knowing that four companies could not capture a picket line more than half a mile long, we withdrew quietly as soon as the firing slackened.

Falling back to the main line once again, the troops soon found themselves hard pressed by large numbers of Federal skirmishers. "All that day (April 1)," according to Graham, "we had a continuous picket and sharpshooter contest with the enemy, losing several men who seemed to think they could not be hit and exposed themselves needlessly." The Union troops to Cooke's front, elements of Major General John Gibbon's Twenty-Fourth Corps, did not attempt to assault the Boydton Plank Road earthworks but rather confined themselves to pinning down the defenders while continuing to consolidate their hold on the former Confederate picket line. Nightfall largely brought an end to the firing. Casualties within the regiment are difficult to determine but, given the intensity of the fire and Captain Graham's remarks, almost certainly added up to several men killed, wounded and captured during the day's actions.<sup>684</sup>

All this picket line combat was an essential part of General Ulysses S. Grant's final offensive against the Army of Northern Virginia and its ten month defense of Petersburg. Beginning on March 28, Grant sent Phillip Sheridan's Cavalry, only recently returned from their victorious campaign in the Shenandoah Valley, on a wide-ranging

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<sup>684</sup> Clark, 453-54; Greene, 223, 257-58, 270; Girvan, 212.

flank march against Lee's right flank and the Southside Railroad. In addition, Gouverneur Warren's Fifth Corps and Andrew Humphreys' Second Corps were ordered to move to the left and strike the Confederate defenses along White Oak Road and Hatcher's Run, thereby assisting Sheridan and threatening the Boydton Plank Road in the process. Finally, the Sixth, Ninth and Twenty-Fourth Corps would maintain pressure against the Confederate defenses in their respective fronts and prepare to launch a joint full scale assault if necessary. Right in the middle of these preparations was Cooke's Brigade, its right flank resting on Hatcher's Run. From March 30 to April 1, elements of Gibbon's Corps succeeded in pinning the majority of Heth's Division within their main line earthworks, thereby keeping them from assisting in the actions taking place against the Confederate right flank.<sup>685</sup>

In the meantime, Grant's offensive went forward undeterred. On March 31 Warren and Humphreys fought Major General Bushrod Johnson's Division to a standstill along the White Oak Road. The next day Sheridan's cavalry and Warren's infantry succeeded in cracking Lee's right flank, commanded by Major General George Pickett, at Five Forks, a vital road junction just one mile south of the Southside Railroad. In the aftermath of this so-called "Waterloo of the Confederacy," the Boydton Plank Road and the Southside Railroad lay exposed to further Union attacks and Lee's hold on Petersburg was rapidly slipping away. Buoyed by this Union victory, Grant ordered his remaining forces to launch an all out assault against the Petersburg defenses on the morning of April 2. Lee, for his part, continued his plans for the evacuation of Petersburg and Richmond,

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<sup>685</sup> Greene, 205-25; Trudeau, 355-56; Girvan, 211-12; Calkins, 30-42.

hoping he could extricate his army and move south toward a junction with Johnston's forces before Grant attacked again.<sup>686</sup>

Beginning around 10:00 p.m. on the first, 150 Union guns from the Sixth and Ninth Corps bombarded the Confederate defenses in their respective fronts. This artillery barrage was in preparation for the planned infantry attack and lasted nearly three hours. The Twenty-Fourth Corps, deployed opposite Cooke's Brigade, did not participate in the bombardment, therefore sparing the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina from the cannonade. While the Federals prepared to rush the Confederate defenses closer to Petersburg, the soldiers of Cooke's Brigade were relieved by Davis' Mississippi Brigade and quietly withdrew from their earthworks. Moving south and west, "our brigade now crossed the creek [Hatcher's Run] and took position in Fort Euliss." The fort, otherwise known as the Crow House Redoubt, had been partially constructed by the men of the regiment earlier that winter and consisted of two enclosed earthen redoubts connected by trenches. Despite the strength of the fort, its position formed something of a salient on the west bank of Hatcher's Run, making it a difficult place to defend against a determined attack. Captain Graham described the regiment's predicament: "Here the enemy were on three sides of us—our only protected side being that from which we had just moved." In this position, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh, in conjunction with the rest of the brigade, sent out a considerable force of pickets and quietly waited for dawn.<sup>687</sup>

Lee's lines on the morning of April 2 were stretched painfully thin, particularly in the section of earthworks between Petersburg and Hatcher's Run, where the defenders

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<sup>686</sup> Greene, 225-42, 257-58, 284-85; Calkins, 42-111; Girvan, 211-12; Trudeau, 356-59; Hess, 290-91.

<sup>687</sup> Clark 454-55; Greene, 257-85, 454; Sloan, 112; Girvan, 213.

were stretched out with as much as eight feet between each man. It just so happened that the main Union attack of the day would target this section of the line. At approximately 4:40 a.m., 14,000 men of the Union Sixth Corps rose from the muddy ground between the opposing lines and rushed forward towards the Confederate earthworks, defended in this sector by Wilcox's Division and elements of Heth's Division. Despite heavy Confederate artillery and infantry fire, the attackers quickly hacked through the abatis and surged over the earthworks, both sides engaging in a brief spat of hand to hand combat before the Confederates finally yielded. The troops of the Sixth Corps quickly widened the breach and pushed forward towards the Boydton Plank Road and the tracks of the Southside Railroad. While riding from his headquarters and trying to rally his troops, Third Corps commander General A.P. Hill was killed by a pair of Union soldiers, leaving General Heth in temporary command of the Corps. While these events were taking place, the men of Cooke's Brigade, positioned in and around Fort Euliss, were engaged in a severe firefight with elements of the Union Second and Twenty-Fourth Corps, both of which were reduced to a supporting role in the Union assault. Captain Sloan described the action:

As soon as day dawned the enemy, being on three sides of us, opened fire upon us with artillery and infantry. Although protected to some extent, some of our men were killed by their shells during the morning. In the meanwhile a desperate fight was going on between fort Euliss and Petersburg. Our position in the fort was only tenable, provided the troops on our left held their position. Consequently, the issue of the fight was awaited by us with much anxiety.<sup>688</sup>

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<sup>688</sup> Sloan, 112; Greene, 293-328, 343-52, 360-61, 430-31; Trudeau, 358-59, 366-79, 391; Clark, 454-55; Girvan, 213; Hess, 291-94.

The outcome of the Sixth Corps assault doomed Cooke's defense of Fort Euliss and made the fall of Petersburg all but inevitable. "Just before sunrise," remembered Captain Sloan, "a courier dashed into the fort with news that the lines had been broken and our troops were in retreat." After securing their immediate gains at the site of the breakthrough, elements of the Sixth Corps wheeled left and began pushing south, driving down the length of the remaining Confederate earthworks. In their path were McComb and Davis' under strength brigades. Despite temporarily checking the Union tidal wave, these troops were eventually outflanked on their left and forced to fall back further, losing many prisoners in the process. In his official report, General Heth recalled: "On the morning of April 2, the enemy succeeded in breaking through our lines some three miles to my left, and rapidly sweeping down the thin line guarding our breastworks, he captured [Joseph Robert] Davis' Mississippi Brigade and a large portion of [William] McComb's Tennessee Brigade." By 7:30 a.m., continually pressed from three sides, and now facing the prospect of being assaulted from the rear, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina were ordered to retreat. Taking in the dire situation, General Cooke quickly ordered his entire brigade to abandon Fort Euliss and fall back to the west, following the north bank of Hatcher's Run as much as possible. While the troops evacuated the earthworks, Union skirmishers from the Second Corps stepped up their probing actions, capturing most of the brigade's pickets in the process. In addition, one brigade of the Twenty-Fourth Corps took the opportunity to seize a battery position just across the creek from the fort. Despite these complications, most of the troops maintained their discipline and successfully completed the evacuation in the face of the

enemy. General Cooke stated: "I sent orders to my brigade to retire up the right bank of the creek...[they] passed out safely, losing a considerable number who were on picket in felled timber very near the enemy forming its forces near Burgess Mill." It is worth noting that Cooke's Brigade was the only force from Heth's Division to maintain any semblance of organization during the hurried retreat from the Boydton Plank Road earthworks. In recognition of this fact, General Heth stated: "[John Rogers] Cooke's Brigade vacated the redoubts and works on the west bank of Hatcher's Run and succeeded in making good his retreat."<sup>689</sup>

By mid-morning the situation confronting General Robert E. Lee was grim indeed. The Confederate earthworks defending the Boydton Plank Road and the Southside Railroad had been irrevocably breached and most of the Third Corps was either cut off from the rest of the army or in full retreat. Only to the east of Petersburg was the situation somewhat hopeful. There, the Confederate Second Corps, commanded by General John B. Gordon had managed to contain the Union Ninth Corps' morning attacks, but this stalemate was only a temporary success. With fresh Union troops, in the form of the Twenty-Fourth Corps, now heading in the direction of Petersburg from the south, Lee informed President Jefferson Davis that Richmond would have to be evacuated that night. The ten-month-old Petersburg Campaign was rapidly coming to an end.<sup>690</sup>

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<sup>689</sup> Greene, 352-68, 430-32; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 810, 814-15; Trudeau, 373-79, 390-92; Clark, 455; Sloan, 112; Girvan, 213.

<sup>690</sup> Greene, 364-68, 442-51.

Following their retreat from Fort Euliss, Cooke's Brigade, along with some of the survivors of MacRae's North Carolina Brigade, crossed the Boydton Plank Road and moved to the northwest in the general direction of the railroad. Meanwhile, General Heth collected three brigades from the White Oak Road entrenchments and likewise withdrew north towards Sutherland Station, a small siding on the Southside Railroad about ten miles west of Petersburg. In their wake came the Union Second Corps division of Brigadier General Nelson Miles, 8,000 men intent on driving off any Confederates that stood between them and the all important railroad. Heth immediately understood the need to delay Miles' advance and ordered the sharpshooters of Brigadier General Samuel McGowan's South Carolina Brigade to harass the enemy at every opportunity. General Cooke likewise detached skirmishers from his brigade to slow the enemy's advance. According to Captain Graham of Company G, "After moving some four or five miles we threw out first one regiment and then another as skirmishers to retard the enemy, who were pressing us hard..."<sup>691</sup>

By around 10:00 a.m. Heth had arrayed four brigades along a low ridgeline just south of the Southside Railroad. On the right of the line stood the Sutherland Tavern while on the left lay the Ocran Methodist Church. In addition to the North Carolinians of Cooke and MacRae's brigades, the defense consisted of McGowan's South Carolinians and Colonel Joseph Hyman's North Carolinians, the latter two brigades originally belonging to Camdus Wilcox's Division. Altogether, this force numbered between 3,000 and 4,000 men, was supported by at least seven artillery pieces from various Third Corps

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<sup>691</sup> Hess, 294-95; Greene, 430-36; Clark, 455; Sloan, 112; Trudeau, 392-94.

batteries, and covered a line of nearly one-half mile. Needing to attend to matters closer to Petersburg, General Heth delegated the defense of the railroad to General Cooke. The Twenty-Seventh's brigade commander reported: "General Heth sent for me immediately on my arrival and, turning over the command to me, told me to hold the position till night. [A] line of battle was formed at 11 o'clock a.m. and every preparation made to check the enemy, who were now close on us in heavy force." The Twenty-Seventh North Carolina and its sister regiments took up position on the far right of the line near the tavern. The entire force quickly began throwing up slight earthworks, utilizing whatever tools came to hand. Captain James Graham described the men's exertions: "We formed a line of battle and threw up breastworks of rails and other stuff we could find near at hand, adding such dirt as we could dig up with our bayonets, tin cups, plates, etc." By 11:00 a.m. Cooke's troops were ready for action once again.<sup>692</sup>

Around 12:00 p.m., the first Federal attack commenced. Miles sent two of his three brigades forward in a frontal assault against the center of Cooke's line. Confederate skirmishers, mostly from McGowan's Brigade, harassed the Union battle line as it advanced but were soon forced to fall back. Cooke let the enemy approach to within several hundred yards before giving the order to fire. The Federal line shuddered and great gaps appeared as men were knocked out of the ranks by the score. Colonel Henry Madill, one of the attacking brigade commanders, fell with a disabling wound. His troops wavered and then fell back in confusion. This initial repulse, the first real Confederate success of the day, elicited a great derisive yell from the defenders. Seeing

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<sup>692</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 814; Greene, 433-36; Hess, 295; Clark, 455.

the enemy's hurried retreat, Cooke ordered his sharpshooters to counterattack the Union flanks. They succeeded in further scattering the enemy and capturing a number of stragglers. In describing this first attack, Captain Sloan stated: "They soon came up flushed with success, and attacked with great confidence. But we repulsed them with heavy loss, capturing many prisoners."<sup>693</sup>

Despite this initial failure, Miles remained determined to drive the Confederates out of the way. The Federals advanced a second time at about 12:30, once again pushing straight ahead against the strongest part of Cooke's line. The results were predictable and this second attack fared no better than the first, only increasing the number of Union casualties lying in front of the Confederate earthworks. Undeterred, the Union commander brought up a single battery of artillery to bombard Cooke's left flank and re-organized his troops for yet another attack. It came just before 4:00 p.m. in the form of a massive two-pronged assault involving the entire Union division. Two of Miles' brigades once again attacked Cooke's front while his third brigade hit the Confederate left flank, quickly rolling up McGowan's overextended line and driving the entire force off the field, capturing hundreds of defenders in the process. Captain James Graham described this stage of the battle: "The fighting was heavy till about 4 o'clock p.m., when the enemy, largely outnumbering us, turned our left flank and we were compelled to retreat." The Twenty-Seventh and its sister regiments, engaged on the extreme right of the line, escaped the worst of this attack and managed to retreat to the northwest in a

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<sup>693</sup> Sloan, 112; Greene, 434-37; Clark 455.

fairly organized fashion. General Cooke reported: "This [the retreat] was done promptly and with not much loss. The enemy did not pursue."<sup>694</sup>

Despite failing to stop the enemy from seizing the Southside Railroad, Cooke's resilient stand at Sutherland Station had delayed the Union advance in this sector for most of the day and inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy. It was indeed the only possible bright spot for the Confederate Third Corps on April 2. In a report filled with discouraging facts and statistics, General Heth's description of the battle somewhat offset the dismal events of the rest of the day: "The enemy soon made his appearance and attacked Cooke, who commanded; he was twice repulsed with heavy loss and was charged by Cooke. A number of prisoners were captured, also several stands of colors. The enemy, however, succeeded with his immense numbers in turning Cooke's left flank, which compelled a hasty withdrawal." Altogether, the four Confederate brigades present suffered at least 700 casualties, most of them captured during the final Union assault. Cooke's Brigade lost comparatively few men. The Twenty-Seventh had one man wounded and sixteen captured during the entire engagement. Union casualties numbered nearly 400 men killed, wounded and captured, including two brigade commanders wounded.<sup>695</sup>

In the aftermath of the engagement, Cooke's troops retreated rapidly to the northwest, generally following the south bank of the Appomattox River and hoping to cross to the north side in order to rejoin the main army. "Falling back about four or five

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<sup>694</sup> Clark, 455; Sloan, 122; Girvan, 213-14; Greene, 437-40; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 814.

<sup>695</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 811-12; Greene, 438-42; Hess, 295-96.

miles the Thirteenth, Twenty-second, Twenty-seventh, and Forty-ninth North Carolina Regiments were thrown out to keep the enemy in check,” remembered James Graham, “while the balance of our troops—Cooke’s, Scales’, and MacRae’s North Carolina Brigades, and McGowan’s South Carolina Brigade—endeavored to cross the river so as to join the main army, from which we had been cut off by the break.” Finding it impossible to cross the river at any point, Captain Sloan recalled, “We followed up our retreat until 2 o’clock that night, when we halted and rested on our arms until morning.”<sup>696</sup>

While these events were taking place southwest of Petersburg, the Union Sixth, Ninth and Twenty-Fourth Corps were enveloping the city from the south and east. Despite the arrival of reinforcements from James Longstreet’s First Corps in the city that afternoon, the situation was irretrievable. Petersburg would have to be abandoned that night, and with it Richmond. Lee made plans for the various parts of his army to evacuate the cities under the cover of darkness and rendezvous at Amelia Court House, roughly forty miles west of Richmond. From there, the re-united Army of Northern Virginia would march southwest along the tracks of the Richmond and Danville Railroad, cross over into North Carolina, and join forces with Joseph Johnston’s Army of Tennessee. If their combined forces could defeat William T. Sherman’s legions in the Tarheel state, and then turn north to deal once again with Grant, there was still hope for the Confederate cause. As Cooke’s troops moved west from Sutherland Station, the bulk of Lee’s army began the evacuation of Petersburg at around 8:00 p.m., crossing the

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<sup>696</sup> Clark, 455-56; Sloan, 113; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 812, 814.

Appomattox River and heading northwest. The scattered remnants of A.P. Hill's Third Corps were now officially attached to Longstreet, who now commanded nearly two-thirds of Lee's infantry. Meanwhile, in Richmond, the situation quickly yielded to chaos as fires meant to destroy war material spread to engulf much of the city's business district. By morning, both cities were devoid of any organized Confederate troops and were quickly captured by jubilant but cautious Federals. The longest siege in American military history had finally come to an end.<sup>697</sup>

The fighting on April 2 had been an unmitigated disaster for the Army of Northern Virginia. In addition to being driven from his defenses, Lee had lost upwards of 5,000 men, nearly ten percent of his army, the vast majority of them captured. Grant's losses were also high, totaling nearly 4,000 men, most of them killed or wounded. The day had likewise been a disaster for the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina and the other regiments of Cooke's Brigade. Out of the slightly more than 200 officers and men on duty with the regiment that morning, at least seventy-six had become casualties as a direct result of the days' fighting and the fall of Petersburg and Richmond. As with the rest of the army, the vast majority of the regiment's losses on April 2 were captured. Included in the total were numerous sick and wounded soldiers who were convalescing in various Richmond and Petersburg military hospitals and not well enough to be moved. In addition, most of the Twenty-Seventh's regimental band was likewise captured during the

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<sup>697</sup> Greene, 379-408, 419-30, 460-82; Trudeau, 355-413; Edward L. Ayers, Gary W. Gallagher, and David W. Blight, *Appomattox Court House*, (Harpers' Ferry, WV: Division of Publications, National Park Service, 2003), 27-42.

day's actions. Luckily for the survivors, the regiment's officer corps remained largely intact.<sup>698</sup>

April 3 found the battered remnants of Cooke's Brigade, in company with other survivors of the breakthrough, moving gradually northwestward towards a junction with the rest of the army at Amelia Court House. General Cooke described the march: "I marched to [Exeter] Mills with the intention of crossing the Appomattox but, finding it impracticable, marched up it without any further event of importance occurring." The men continued on after dark until reaching the vicinity of Goode's Bridge, perhaps five miles short of Amelia Court House. Following a brief rest, remembered Captain Graham, "About 1 o'clock that night we got orders to march, and, after passing through by-roads and open fields, about 3 o'clock a.m., 4 April, 1865, came upon the leading brigade of General Lee's Army." Having arrived at Amelia, the regiment quickly bivouacked in a grove in front of the home of a Dr. Southall. Graham continued in describing the emotional reunion:

Soon after sunrise our beloved General-in-Chief, R.E. Lee, was seen approaching. Upon the suggestion of Lieutenant-Colonel Webb, we rose as he neared us, and every man raised his hat and gave him three cheers. To rejoin our main army, after having been cut off for three days, was indeed like getting home from a distant voyage, and I don't think I ever saw men more rejoiced at anything than we were at being again with our comrades.<sup>699</sup>

With the Army of Northern Virginia now concentrating in and around Amelia, Lee turned his attention to supplies. The general had been informed upon leaving

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<sup>698</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98; Girvan, 213; Hess, 298; Greene, 467-68.

<sup>699</sup> Clark, 456-57; Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 814; Sloan, 113; Noah Andre Trudeau, *The Campaign to Appomattox*, National Park Civil War Series, (Washington, DC: Eastern National, 1995), 2-11; Girvan, 214.

Petersburg that rations would be awaiting his army at this point. Upon inspection of the trains however, Lee discovered that ammunition had been mistakenly forwarded instead. With no food to issue to his famished troops, Lee ordered foraging parties to spread out into the surrounding countryside, they would not return until the next day. Meanwhile, a major re-organization took place within the ranks of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina. Captain Sloan of Company B described the result: "At the suggestion of the officers of the regiment, it was agreed, there being only about seventy men for duty, that we should form a battalion of two companies, the officers giving up their rank temporarily, and the non-commissioned officers going into the ranks." Under this re-organization, Lieutenant-Colonel Webb remained in command of the battalion while Major Calvin Herring and Captain John Sloan commanded the First and Second companies respectively. In commenting on this overhaul, Captain James Graham, now relegated to the role of company first sergeant, recalled, "A requisition was immediately made upon the Ordnance Sergeant for guns to supply the officers who had just gone temporarily into the ranks. This is the only instance that I heard of during the war of a reorganization of this sort. It shows a determination to stick by anything they undertake that is characteristic of North Carolinians." That night, as the scattered elements of Lee's army continued to arrive from the east, the officers and men of Cooke's Brigade cooked what rations were available and bivouacked in the woods just outside of Amelia Court House. This was probably the first real sleep many of them had had in days.<sup>700</sup>

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<sup>700</sup> Sloan, 113-14; Clark, 457-58; Trudeau, *Appomattox*, 8-11.

While these events were taking place, Ulysses S. Grant was laying plans to not only pursue Lee's army but to cut it off. After securing Richmond and Petersburg, Union troops began moving west along the south side of the Appomattox River, largely paralleling the tracks of the Southside Railroad. It was Grant's intention to get to the Richmond and Danville Railroad in the vicinity of Burkeville before Lee could move south from Amelia, thereby blocking the Confederate route of retreat towards North Carolina and a union with Johnston's army. Sheridan's cavalry divisions were given this task. They were followed up by the bulk of Grant's infantry, the Second, Fifth and Sixth corps of the Army of the Potomac. Elements of the Union Army of the James, under the command of Major General Edward Ord, would march parallel on roads further to the south and along the railroad itself. While Lee waited for his foragers to return, Sheridan's cavalry arrived at Jetersville, roughly halfway between Amelia Court House and Burkeville, on the afternoon of April 4. They were soon reinforced by the infantry of the Fifth Corps. As yet unknown to Lee, the Army of Northern Virginia's route south was already blocked.<sup>701</sup>

Lee discovered the dire situation now confronting his army early in the afternoon of April 5. As the re-united army moved south in the direction of Jetersville and Burkeville, reports came in of Sheridan's cavalry up ahead. Initially hopeful that his troops could break through the Federal cavalry roadblock, the Confederate commander was horrified to learn that at least one corps of Union infantry was also present, with more enemy troops on the way. Instead of risking a bloody and possibly disastrous

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<sup>701</sup> Ayers, Gallagher, and Blight, *Appomattox Court House*, 44-52; Trudeau, *Appomattox*, 8-13.

frontal assault, Lee ordered his army to turn west and head for Farmville. The Confederates now hoped to outdistance the Federal pursuers, receive rations via the Southside Railroad from Burkeville and Lynchburg, and then finally make their turn to the south, passing through Danville and on into North Carolina. In the midst of breaking camp, the troops of Cooke's Brigade were called upon to rescue the army's wagon train, which found itself under attack by Union cavalry in the vicinity of Paineville, just a few miles north of Amelia Court House. Captain James Graham described the following action:

Just as we were leaving camp, the enemy attacked and began burning our wagon train, some two miles distant. Our brigade was ordered, with other troops, to drive them off, and going up the road at a quick pace we soon passed burning ammunition wagons with shells bursting, and cartridges popping continually. Then we came to the provision train where roasted hams and nicely browned crackers could be seen among the ruins, but we had no time to stop to taste these tempting morsels. Before we had caught up with the enemy they had given up this work of destruction and fled, our only spoils being about a dozen prisoners who were too drunk to stick to their horses and had fallen off.

Following this unhappy diversion, the Twenty-Seventh was hustled back into the main column, which was confined to using one main road and therefore stretched out nearly fifteen miles in length. Despite the near exhaustion of men and animals, Lee, desperate to get well ahead of Grant's forces, consigned the Army of Northern Virginia to an all night march toward Farmville.<sup>702</sup>

Intermittent rain greeted the troops on April 6, a day soon to be remembered as one of the darkest days of the Confederacy. Upon reaching Holt's Corner, roughly halfway between Amelia Court House and Farmville, the army was able to utilize two

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<sup>702</sup> Ayers, Gallagher, and Blight, 46-53; Clark, 458; Trudeau, *Appomattox*, 14-16.

roads instead of one. Both routes led to Rice's Station on the Southside Railroad, only a few miles short of Farmville. As Gordon's Second Corps and a motley collection of troops under Generals Richard Ewell and Richard Anderson brought up the rear and protected the remaining wagon trains, Longstreet's combined First and Third Corps continued west, arrived in the vicinity of Rice's Station by noon and began throwing up slight earthworks. Slowed by the lumbering wagon train, the rear guard was attacked by Union cavalry and infantry as they attempted to negotiate the crossing of Little Sailor's Creek. The resulting battle was a disaster for the Army of Northern Virginia. Ewell and Anderson's troops were overwhelmed, suffering nearly 6,000 casualties, most of them captured. To the north, meanwhile, Gordon's troops were likewise driven back, losing another 2,000 men in the process, but maintained their organization and managed to save at least some of the wagons.<sup>703</sup>

Although not directly engaged in the battle, elements of Cooke's Brigade, positioned at the rear of Longstreet's column, were involved in trying to protect part of the wagon train that had escaped the disaster along Sailor's Creek. Captain John Franklin Heitman of the Forty-Eighth North Carolina described the action in his diary: "about 1 o'clock the Twenty-seventh and Forty-eighth Regiments were sent back [from Rice's] two miles to protect wagon trains, and on arriving at the trains encountered Yankee cavalry and a skirmish ensued. We were driven back." Despite failing to save the wagons, the two regiments were able to avoid being surrounded by the superior force of Union cavalry and succeeded in putting up a stiff fight from the cover of some nearby

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<sup>703</sup> Trudeau, *Appomattox*, 16-22; Ayers, Gallagher, and Blight, 53-57; Hess, 300-301.

woods. Unable to dislodge the stubborn North Carolinians, the Federal horsemen eventually retired, allowing the defenders to fall back and rejoin their brigade. That night, the retreat towards Farmville continued. Captain Sloan aptly described the daily existence of the regiment during this time: "We now continued our march, fighting by day and retreating by night...Organization and discipline was now rapidly giving away. We were skirmishing and fighting to protect ourselves at every point in a kind of Guerrilla warfare, every man, for the most part, doing his fighting on his own hook."<sup>704</sup>

After a short rest near Rice's Station, Lee had Longstreet's troops in motion towards Farmville at an early hour on April 7. The survivors of Sailor's Creek, on the other hand, would make for High Bridge, the Southside Railroad crossing of the Appomattox River, a few miles northeast of Farmville. Despite crossing the river ahead of the Federals and partially burning the railroad span, the Confederate rear guard failed to set fire to the adjacent wagon bridge before Union troops arrived on the scene and saved the smaller span from the flames. Lee had planned to put the Appomattox River between his army and the pursuing Union forces, but this was now impossible. Hustling through Farmville, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, in conjunction with the rest of the combined First and Third Corps, grabbed what rations they could from the trains and crossed over the Appomattox on a pair of bridges, both of which were later burned successfully. Captain Sloan described the movement: "The next day we passed through Farmville. Having been the rear guard [of Longstreet's command] for several days, we were now relieved by Scales' North Carolina brigade."

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<sup>704</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the OR, Part I, Vol. VII*, 815; Clark, 458-59; Sloan, 114.

Once across the river, Lee re-organized his scattered troops near Cumberland Church. The Union Second Corps, meanwhile, had crossed the river near High Bridge and launched a series of sharp attacks against Lee's new line later that afternoon and into the evening. Despite lapping around the Confederate left, the assaults were uncoordinated and were ultimately repulsed with nearly 600 Union casualties. Captain James Graham remembered, "At one point during the evening it seemed as though we were completely surrounded. Our brigade, and I supposed it was the same with the other troops, was ordered from place to place in quick succession to meet threatened attacks." Desperate for food supplies with which to feed his exhausted and famished troops, and having just refused an initial surrender demand from Grant, Lee ordered the Army of Northern Virginia to head for the next available depot on the Southside Railroad. Appomattox Station was roughly forty miles west of Cumberland Church and was only a few miles outside of a small village named Appomattox Court House. It was here that Confederate commissary trains awaited the army's arrival. Meanwhile, Grant, still intent on trapping Lee before he made it to North Carolina, was preparing to send Sheridan's cavalry on another wide-ranging flanking operation to the west. The question was, who would win the race to Appomattox Station?<sup>705</sup>

Marching west from Cumberland Church on the morning of April 8, the Army of Northern Virginia was divided on two parallel roads until reaching New Store, roughly sixteen miles away, where the two routes merged into the Richmond Lynchburg Stage Road. Upon reaching the small village, Lee adjusted his column. Gordon, having held

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<sup>705</sup> Sloan, 114; Clark, 459-60; Trudeau, *Appomattox*, 25-28; Hess, 301; Ayers, Gallagher and Blight, 60-62.

the rear guard for the past several days, was relieved by Longstreet's combined First and Third Corps, which included the troops of Cooke's Brigade. Although the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh were thus faced with the prospect of further action, no serious fighting erupted during the day's march. By this stage of the retreat, organization and morale had diminished throughout the army. Many soldiers, too exhausted and hungry to continue on, simply threw down their arms and wandered away from the column or waited to be picked up by the Federal pursuers. Losses from battle and desertion within the regiment during this time were apparently much lower than average. From April 3-8, the Twenty-Seventh had suffered only a handful of casualties, including one man wounded, fifteen captured and three wounded and captured. The relative lack of desertion and straggling from the ranks of the regiment during this time remains a testament to the resiliency and determination inherent in the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina. In terms of the army as a whole, of the more than 55,000 men who had begun the retreat on April 2, barely 30,000 were still with the army.<sup>706</sup>

While the Confederates marched west, Union forces were moving behind them and on parallel roads south of the Appomattox River. Grant sent the Second and Sixth Corps in pursuit of Lee's column from Cumberland Church while Sheridan's cavalry, the Fifth Corps, and elements of the Army of the James moved along the Southside Railroad towards Appomattox Station. Thanks in part to slightly shorter roads, this Union force

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<sup>706</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98; Ayers, Gallagher and Blight, 62-64; Trudeau, *Appomattox*, 28-30; Chris Calkins, *The Battles of Appomattox Station and Appomattox Court House, April 8-9, 1865*, (Lynchburg, VA: H.E. Howard, Inc., 1987), 3-12.

south of the river would arrive at the station just ahead of the Confederates, sealing the fate of Lee's army, including the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina. Descending upon the trains early that evening, Federal cavalymen of General George Armstrong Custer's division captured the vital food supplies, drove off the advance elements of the Army of Northern Virginia, and all but blocked Lee's escape route further west. Meanwhile, following a lengthy and exhausting day's march, the officers and men of Cooke's Brigade arrived in the Appomattox area from the northeast and bivouacked along the Richmond Lynchburg Stage Road near New Hope Church. Captain Sloan recalled, "Saturday night, April 8, we camped within about three miles of Appomattox Court-House." That night, realizing the dire situation that now confronted his army, Lee held a council of war with his highest-ranking subordinates, including James Longstreet and John Gordon, during which it was decided that Gordon's Second Corps, still in the lead, would launch an attack to the west the next morning and attempt to re-open the army's escape route. Lee knew that if this attack failed he would have no choice but to surrender the Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>707</sup>

That night and into the next morning, Heth's Division helped form the rear guard of the army. Deployed perpendicular to the Lynchburg Richmond Stage Road near New Hope Church, Longstreet's entire command was ordered to entrench and hold off the pursuing Union troops of the Second and Sixth Corps. Despite these orders, it appears that Cooke's Brigade, and possibly MacRae's as well, were taken out of Longstreet's

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<sup>707</sup> Calkins, *Battles of Appomattox*, 12-57; Sloan, 114; Trudeau, *Appomattox*, 30-33; Ayers, Gallagher, and Blight, 64-66; Hess, 302.

lines and sent forward to form a reserve for Gordon's troops. Captain James Graham described the regiment's movements on the morning of April 9:

Leaving camp about an hour or two before day next morning we were moved further to the front, and about daylight, a little meal having been issued to us for the first time in four days, we halted to cook rations. Before our bread was half done we were ordered forward again. Passing rapidly up the road, which was filled with wagons and ambulances, we soon came upon a Federal battery, fully equipped and driven by their own men, in the midst of our wagon train. We did not understand this at first, but soon learned that it had been captured that morning by our troops at the front and sent it.

That morning, Gordon's troops, largely directed by Major General Bryan Grimes and supported by Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry, had overwhelmed the Union cavalry deployed along the stage road and succeeded in capturing the better part of a Federal battery. This initial success, however, was short lived as Union reinforcements in the form of the Twenty-Fourth and Fifth corps arrived from the west and south, respectively, driving the Confederates back towards Appomattox Court House and sealing off Lee's escape route once and for all.<sup>708</sup>

As Gordon's troops retreated, Cooke's Brigade, in company with other elements of the Army of Northern Virginia, were deployed into a final defensive line on the north side of the Appomattox River, facing the town and the Federal troops beyond. Captain Sloan described the situation: "We came within view of Appomattox Court-House, where we could plainly see the Federal line of battle on the hills at and beyond the court-house. We were immediately thrown into line of battle on the right of the road and ordered to hold ourselves in readiness to advance at any moment. On the front line we awaited

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<sup>708</sup> Calkins, *Battles of Appomattox*, 57-131; Clark, 460; Hess, 302-303; Sloan, 114; Trudeau, *Appomattox*, 34-38; Ayers, Gallagher and Blight, 66-69.

further orders.” With the breakout attempt having failed, and with enemy forces closing in on the remnant of his army from three directions, Lee accepted the inevitable and agreed to meet with Grant to discuss the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia. Beginning around 10:00 a.m., flags of truce were sent out from the Confederates lines along both Gordon and Longstreet’s fronts. The truce was a pre-condition for a face to face meeting between Grant and Lee, which took place that afternoon in the parlor of the McLean House, a private residence in the town of Appomattox Court House. These developments were partly deciphered by the men in the ranks. According to James Graham, “It was whispered among our men that a surrender was to be made. All talk of this kind was soon hushed up by the officers. We still could not understand why we did not charge until about 12 o’clock, when we found out that we [were to be surrendered].”<sup>709</sup>

The terms of surrender, worked out between 1:30 and 3:00 that afternoon, were extremely generous. All of Lee’s remaining troops, roughly 30,000 men, were to be paroled and allowed to return to their homes, provided that they turned over their government issued arms, equipment, and battle flags. In addition, Confederate officers were allowed to keep all of their personal property, such as horses, baggage and even side arms. Cavalrymen and artillerymen who owned their own mounts were also permitted to keep those animals for use on their farms. Finally, Union rations would be distributed to the nearly starving Confederates. “During the afternoon,” stated Captain Graham, “we learned the terms of surrender—that we would be paroled and allowed to go home.”

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<sup>709</sup> Sloan, 114; Clark, 460-61; Calkins, *Battles of Appomattox*, 132-44; Trudeau, *Appomattox*, 37-41.

Robert E. Lee's surrender affected only the Army of Northern Virginia, not the other three major Confederate armies then in the field from North Carolina to Texas. As such, the men returning home would be faced with the possibility of encountering continued hostilities. Without proof of their parole, these soldiers risked being re-captured by Federal forces or punished for desertion by other Confederate troops. In a second meeting between Grant and Lee, held on April 10, it was decided to issue each surrendered officer and soldier a parole pass, which provided the necessary proof of their honorable surrender. These parole passes would be printed up and distributed over the next few days, meaning that the men could not begin their return home until receiving their passes. That same day, the officers of Brigadier General John R. Cooke's North Carolina Brigade gathered in camp to write a farewell letter to their brigade commander. The assembled officers, including Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Webb and Major Calvin Herring of the Twenty-Seventh, praised Cooke's command abilities as well as his friendship during the past three years of war, first as colonel of the regiment and later as their brigade commander.<sup>710</sup>

One part of the surrender terms required the Confederates to turn over any government issued arms and equipment to the Union army. For the infantry of the Army of Northern Virginia, including the survivors of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, this was done on April 12 during a formal surrender ceremony in which the troops would have to stack their arms in front of one full division of Union soldiers. Following this

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<sup>710</sup> Trudeau, *Appomattox*, 42-56; Ayers, Gallagher and Blight, 70-77; Clark, 461; "Farewell Letter from the Officers of Cooke's Brigade to Brigadier General John R. Cooke," Appomattox Court House, Virginia, April 10, 1865, Cooke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

ceremony, the Confederates were free to return home by the most direct route. In describing this last day in camp, James Graham related:

We remained in this position till Wednesday, 12 April, 1865, when we marched over near the Court House and stacked our arms in front of the enemy. Having received our paroles we started that evening for home, the men of the different companies forming into squads took the nearest route to their own sections, and the Twenty-seventh Regiment of North Carolina Troops passed out of existence.

Out of a regimental strength of more than 300 as of late February, the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina surrendered only twelve officers and 105 men at Appomattox Court House less than two months later. Among the lucky few were Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Webb, Major Calvin Herring, Sergeant Major William Ward, and Regimental Surgeon Howard Lloyd. In terms of the nine individual companies represented at the surrender, two, Companies C and I, had no officer in command, while five others had only one officer still on duty. Only three members of the Regimental Band had managed to avoid capture during the fall of Petersburg and the retreat to Appomattox. In terms of Cooke's Brigade as a whole, only 560 officers and men, representing the Fifteenth, Twenty-Seventh, Forty-Sixth, Forty-Eighth, and Fifty-Fifth North Carolina regiments, were surrendered at Appomattox Court House.<sup>711</sup>

Although the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina no longer existed as a regiment, Company F, otherwise known as the "Perquimans Beauregards," was still intact and serving in General Joseph Johnston's newly re-organized Army of Tennessee. Having been detached for service in North Carolina back in February, the company had spent the

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<sup>711</sup> Clark, 461-62; Sloan, 116; U.S. War Department, *OR, Series I, Vol. 46, Part I*, 1277-78; Jordan and Manarin, 8-98; Trudeau, *Appomattox*, 49-50.

last several months searching for deserters and helping to maintain law and order in the Greensboro area. On April 15, the company, in conjunction with other detached troops from Lee's army, was involved in dispersing a mob of soldiers and civilians who were looting state quartermaster warehouses in Greensboro. After firing several volleys into the unruly looters, which included several dozen Tennessee and Kentucky cavalymen, the "Beauregards" succeeded in securing the warehouses and preventing any further theft or destruction of North Carolina state property. These would prove to be the last shots of the war fired by members of the Twenty-Seventh.<sup>712</sup>

By mid-April, the military situation confronting Joseph Johnston was extremely dire. Sherman's armies, totaling nearly 100,000 men, occupied much of eastern North Carolina and were advancing westward towards Raleigh and Greensboro. The state capital fell on April 13. Johnston, meanwhile, possessed an army of fewer than 40,000 men, many of them scattered and demoralized. Accepting the inevitable, and going against the wishes of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, Johnston agreed to meet with Sherman on April 17 at the farmhouse of the Bennett family, roughly halfway between Durham's Station and Hillsborough. In an ironic twist of fate, Mr. James Bennett's son, Lorenzo, had served in the "Orange Guards," Company G, Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, until his death in October of 1862 from Typhoid Fever. The initial terms of surrender worked out between Sherman and Johnston were seen as too lenient by the Republicans in Congress and were therefore rejected. Despite this failure, a second meeting took place at the Bennett farm on April 26. This conference resulted in

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<sup>712</sup> Bradley, *The Road to Bennett Place*, 153-54, 296.

the surrender of the Army of Tennessee as well as all of the remaining Confederate troops then serving in the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida, altogether about 90,000 men. The terms agreed to were almost identical to those offered to Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox two weeks earlier. The officers and men were to be paroled and allowed to return to their homes undisturbed. Company F of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, at this time numbering fewer than twenty men, was included in the terms of surrender.<sup>713</sup>

Numerous other members of the regiment, including convalescents, those on detached duty with the Quartermaster or Commissary departments, and those currently on furlough, were also included in the surrender of Johnston's army. Corporal David Thompson of Company G, having received a furlough in late March allowing him to visit his family near Hillsborough, was caught up in these events and received his official parole on May 16. Colonel George F. Whitfield, sufficiently recovered from his Cold Harbor wound and attempting to re-join the regiment, was likewise paroled as part of Johnston's army. Writing to John R. Cooke in December of 1865, Whitfield remembered, "I was on my way to the Army when Petersburg fell, and was at Danville when Genl Lee surrendered. I then joined Genl Johnston and remained with him until the cause went up." While those members of the regiment surrendered at Appomattox Court House and Bennett Place were paroled and allowed to return home immediately, all of those officers and men captured during the final actions around Petersburg and on Lee's retreat were instead sent north to Union prisoner of war camps. Many of these unlucky

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<sup>713</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 53-62; Bradley, 132-232.

soldiers were destined to remain imprisoned until June, during which time at least two men from the Twenty-Seventh died from disease. It was not until June 27, nearly two and half months after Lee's surrender at Appomattox, that all of these Southern prisoners were finally released and allowed to go home.<sup>714</sup>

Whenever and however these men returned home, rather on foot, on horseback or by train, few knew for sure what awaited them. Despite the relatively fixed system of furloughs throughout the war, many soldiers had not seen their homes or their families in several years. With vast stretches of central and eastern North Carolina now occupied by Federal troops, it remained to be seen how these returning former Confederates would adapt to life in a South that had been conquered despite the best efforts of its soldiers, including those who had served in the ranks of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina. Despite the shattered economy and the loss of so many productive young men during the war, including 40,000 dead from North Carolina alone, the returning veterans of uncountable battles and skirmishes picked up the pieces of their pre-war lives and worked as best they could to re-build their communities. Others sought out new lives elsewhere. Texas, Arkansas, and other frontier states were common destinations for numerous Confederate veterans who now had little or nothing waiting for them at home.

And then there were those who never returned home. Throughout the war, the ranks of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina had been severely reduced by combat and disease. Out of a total enrollment of 1,473 officers and men, 399 did not survive the

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<sup>714</sup> "Parole Pass of Corporal David Thompson of Orange County, North Carolina," May 16, 1865, Samuel Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; George F. Whitfield, Moseley Hall, North Carolina, to John R. Cooke, Richmond, Virginia, December 30, 1865, Cooke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

four-year conflict. This number included 106 killed in action, seventy-eight mortally wounded, and 215 dead from disease or accidents. Overall, the regiment suffered more than 1,031 total battle casualties including 184 officers and men killed or mortally wounded, 516 wounded, 274 captured, and fifty-four wounded and captured. In terms of losses at the company level, Companies B and D had the worst death rates by far. The “Guilford Grays” and “Tuckahoe Braves” each lost thirty-six percent of their total enrollments from wounds and disease. In terms of overall casualty rates, Companies B and G, the two piedmont organizations in the regiment, suffered the heaviest losses. The “Grays” battle casualties topped ninety-one percent, while eighty-one percent of the “Orange Guards” were counted as casualties at some point during the war. Every remaining company in the regiment suffered at least fifty percent casualties. In terms of leadership, the Twenty-Seventh went through at least twelve different commanding officers during the course of the war, from Colonel George B. Singletary to Lieutenant Colonel Joseph C. Webb. None of these men were killed in action, but wounds, disease, promotion, and resignation all took their toll on the stability of the regiment’s command structure.<sup>715</sup>

Losses aside from wounds and disease also abounded in the regiment throughout their service from New Bern to Bennett Place. Overall, 231 men deserted the ranks, the vast majority during the last year of the war. Of this number, twenty-eight men ultimately returned to duty. In terms of individual companies, the worst offenders included Companies I and K. The “Southern Rights Infantry” of Jones County counted

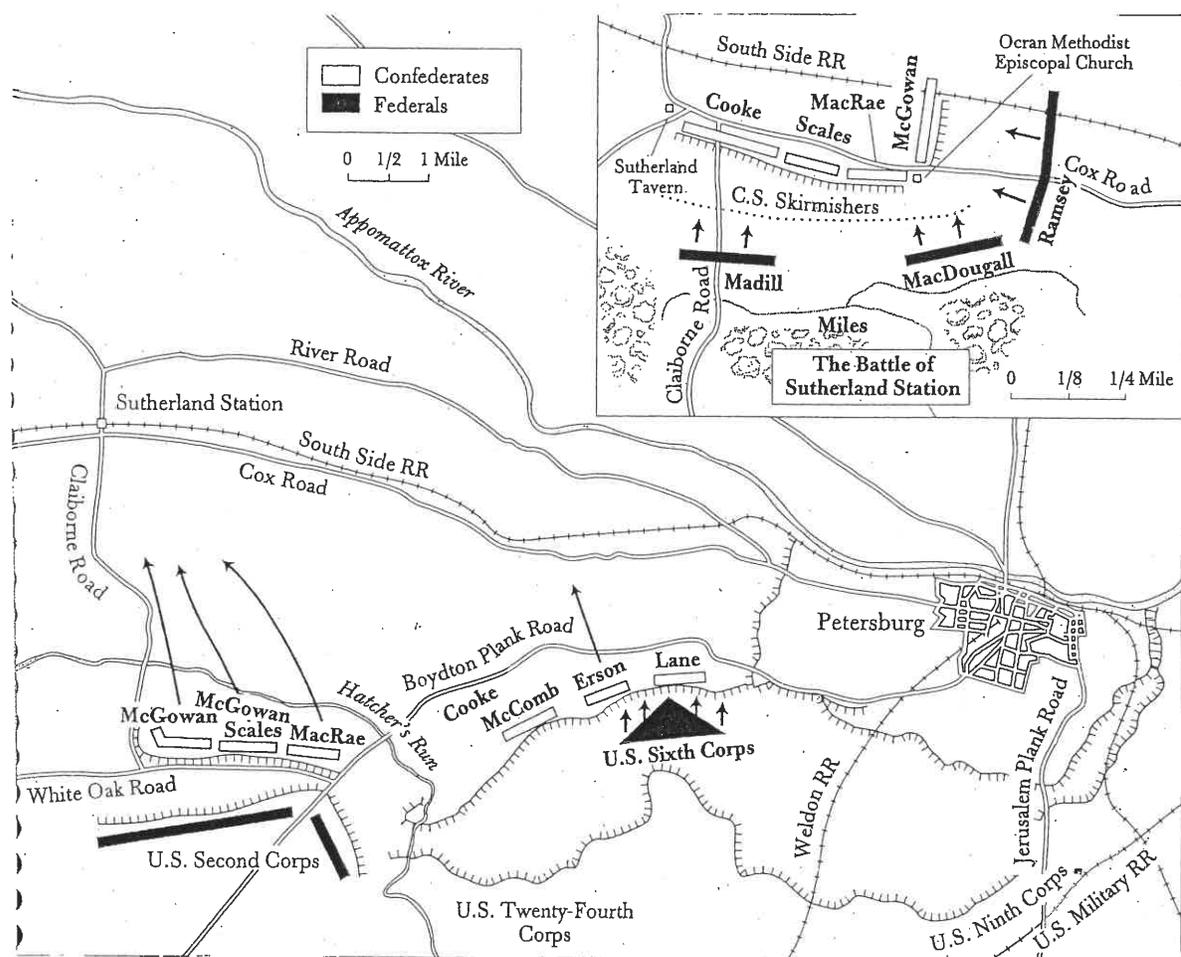
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<sup>715</sup> Jordan and Manarin, 7-98.

thirty-five deserters while the “Saulston Volunteers” of Wayne County lost forty men through this desperate action. In addition, 283 officers and men were discharged from service during the course of the war. The reasons given for discharges were numerous and included physical or mental disability due to wounds or sickness as well as being too young or too old for service under the provisions of the Confederate Conscription Act. Finally, 104 men were transferred to different commands while thirty-six of the regiment’s officers succeeded in resigning their commissions, often following their defeat for re-election.<sup>716</sup>

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<sup>716</sup> Ibid.



The Fall of Petersburg, April 2, 1865<sup>717</sup>

<sup>717</sup> Hess, 293.

## Conclusion

From its organization at New Bern in September of 1861 to the surrenders at Appomattox Court House and Bennett Place in April of 1865, the Twenty-Seventh Regiment of North Carolina Troops proved to be one of the best combat units in the Confederate States Army. Often stationed in relatively backwater theaters, such as eastern North Carolina and coastal South Carolina, during the first two years of the war, the regiment nevertheless proved itself on numerous occasions during this time. Their service was especially notable at the bloody battles of Sharpsburg and Fredericksburg. On September 17, 1862 near a stream known as Antietam Creek, the Twenty-Seventh held a vital position between the West Woods and the so-called "Bloody Lane," initiating a remarkably successful counterattack at a critical moment in the fighting. Despite ultimately being forced back to their original positions, the officers and men of the regiment obeyed their orders to hold their position in the face of almost certain death or capture. This brave stand helped convince Union General George McClellan to call off any further attacks on this part of the field, thereby preserving Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia to fight again another day. Initially posted atop the vitally important ridgeline known as Marye's Heights on December 13, 1862, the Twenty-Seventh was also heavily involved in the fighting at Fredericksburg. During the course of the day, the regiment was ordered down into the Sunken Road and took up a strong defensive position behind the famous stone wall, assisting troops from Georgia and South Carolina in repulsing multiple Federal assaults on this part of Lee's defensive line.

Although absent from the famous battles of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg in the spring and summer of 1863, the regiment re-joined Lee's army that October, just in time to participate in one of the Confederate commander's more daring, but less well known, counterstrokes. The result of the offensive was a disaster to the Twenty-Seventh as well as its sister regiments in Brigadier General John R. Cooke's North Carolina Brigade. At the Battle of Bristoe Station on October 14, 1863, the regiment participated in a direct frontal assault against a nearly impregnable defensive position. The results were horrific. More than fifty percent of the Twenty-Seventh's officers and men became casualties in the relatively brief and completely futile affair. Despite the crippling losses suffered by the regiment at Sharpsburg and Bristoe Station, the survivors remained determined to do their duty until Southern independence or total Confederate defeat brought about an end to the conflict.

Following a relatively quiet time in winter quarters outside of Orange Court House, the Twenty-Seventh fought through the bloody Overland Campaign of May and June of 1864, helping to bring Ulysses S. Grant's offensive to a standstill at the battles of the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House and Cold Harbor. At the Wilderness on May 5, Cooke's Brigade held a vital position on the north side of the Orange Plank Road, repulsing one Union attack after another and assuring the survival of General A. P. Hill's Third Corps until the arrival of James Longstreet's reinforcements the next morning. Likewise, at Cold Harbor on June 3, the regiment helped hold Lee's left flank against a series of Federal assaults. During the ensuing Petersburg Campaign, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh faced nearly ten months of tedious trench warfare interspersed

with occasional hard fought engagements for control of the road and railroad supply lines radiating out from the city. On August 25 at Reams' Station, Cooke's Brigade, in conjunction with other North Carolina troops, succeeded in driving elements of the once vaunted Union Second Corps from a strong defensive position, thereby protecting the Weldon Railroad from further destruction and helping to preserve Lee's hold on Petersburg and the Confederate capital of Richmond.

By early 1865 the Confederate war effort was collapsing. Despite bad news from almost every quarter and a dangerous rise in desertion from the ranks, the majority of the regiment remained committed to the cause of Southern independence. As of March of 1865, the Twenty-Seventh was considered to be one of the best drilled and most disciplined units in the Army of Northern Virginia. But no amount of resolve or discipline could alter the outcome of the war at this stage. Retreating with the army from Petersburg on the night of April 2, the survivors of the regiment were included in the surrenders at Appomattox Court House and Bennett Place. Although ultimately defeated, the former members of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina could proudly look back upon their sterling war record. Through nearly four long years of war, the regiment had fought bravely and superbly on numerous fields of battle. On several occasions Robert E. Lee himself had commented upon their actions, both on and off the battlefield. Despite their general lack of acknowledgment today, the officers and men of the Twenty-Seventh Regiment of North Carolina Troops deserve to be recognized for forging one of the best regiments in the Army of Northern Virginia, if not the entire Confederate Army, during the American Civil War.

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