

CHAPTER 3

Incomprehensible Movements

Colonel Edward Porter Alexander took several hours to complete his assigned reconnaissance of the proposed battleground. He then returned to collect his artillery battalion and guide his guns, men, and horses into position. Alexander was cautious when moving his guns to avoid exposing them to a Union signal station on Little Round Top, although his post-war accounts did not specify the route he took. The battalion came in sight of the signal station while moving on “the direct road” that led to Pitzer’s Schoolhouse on Willoughby Run, a well-known landmark west of Seminary Ridge. “I turned out of the road before reaching the exposed part, and passing through some meadows a few hundred yards, regained the road without coming in sight,” Alexander recalled. He continued to his destination undetected and it was early afternoon when he parked his batteries in the Willoughby Run valley to await the Confederate infantry’s arrival.¹

1 Alexander, “Letter From General E. P. Alexander,” *SHSP*, 4: 101; *Military Memoirs*, 391-392; “The Great Charge and Artillery Fighting at Gettysburg,” *Battles and Leaders*, 3: 359. Alexander’s timings are problematic for some Gettysburg students. In his 1877 *Southern Historical Society Papers* letter, his reconnaissance occupied “according to the best of my recollection, one or two hours, when I rode back, and in person conducted my own battalion to the schoolhouse on Willoughby run.” In *Battles and Leaders* (359), Alexander wrote that it took “about three hours” to reconnoiter and park his artillery. In *Military Memoirs* (392), he wrote that all was in readiness “by noon.” Some historians have been troubled by the notion that Alexander’s artillery sat unsupported along Willoughby Run for several hours, in close proximity to the subsequent Federal skirmishing in Pitzer’s Woods, and in danger of Buford’s still present cavalry. Yet Alexander clearly arrived ahead

Longstreet put his infantry column into motion sometime between 12:00 and 1:00 p.m. The objective was to reach Seminary Ridge and place his corps on the right of Major General Richard Anderson's division of A. P. Hill's Third Corps. General Joseph Kershaw's Brigade, in McLaws's Division, led the column. Kershaw's precise starting point is uncertain, but he began on or near Herr Ridge, a prominent ridgeline slightly more than one mile west of Seminary Ridge. One of Kershaw's post-war accounts suggested that he spent the morning about 500 yards from the Black Horse Tavern waiting to begin the march. If accurate, then the head of Longstreet's column needed to march over a distance of less than three miles to reach their destination. At a rate of two miles per hour, the march might have consumed 90 minutes. Longstreet's 14,000-man command, including supply wagons, occupied several miles of road space as they wound their way slowly along the narrow country roads.²

Longstreet's march did not go well. Concealment from the enemy's signal station was considered essential, as was the need for the troops to reach their destination quickly and avoid allowing Meade's army additional time to concentrate. Surely, Lee and Longstreet did not assume Johnston's early-morning intelligence would remain static for the entire day.

of Longstreet, so the question is how far in advance? An arrival closer to 1:00 p.m. rather than "by noon" would better address the above issues and still give Alexander time to go back and meet Longstreet's stalled column. It is also sometimes assumed that Alexander had charge of moving Cabell and Henry's battalions along with his own. But Alexander wrote in 1877 that he "rode back, and in person conducted my own battalion to the schoolhouse on Willoughby run." See *SHSP*, 4: 101. Alexander wrote in *Fighting for the Confederacy* (236) that he waited for the "infantry & Cabell's & Henry's battalions." Colonel Cabell wrote in 1877, "We moved with the infantry of Gen. McLaws' Division." See Cabell, "A Visit to the Battlefield of Gettysburg," VHS, 2. Ironically in his *OR*, Alexander wrote that his own "march into position was performed with these divisions" of Hood and McLaws. See *OR*, 27/2: 429.

2 Kershaw, "Kershaw's Brigade at Gettysburg," *Battles and Leaders*, 3: 331. General Kershaw described his brigade being halted "at the end of the lane leading to the Black Horse Tavern, situated some 500 yards to our right," which would have placed him near the war-time Adam Butt farm on Herr Ridge. Kershaw added, "We lay there awaiting orders until noon, or an hour later." Kershaw also wrote John Bachelder in 1876 that they moved "about one and a half o'clock" but cautioned, "I speak from memory." In the Bachelder version, Kershaw also said, "the head of the column having reached the mouth of a lane which the road then entered at Hoss' house." This would have placed Kershaw's head of column roughly an additional 0.6 miles further up Herr Ridge. See Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, 1: 453. General McLaws's "recollection is that it was about 1 P.M." when put in motion. See McLaws, "Gettysburg," *SHSP*, 7: 69. J.S. McNeily wrote, "At eleven o'clock the battle order was delivered, and after waiting half an hour longer for one of Hood's brigades to come up, we moved off toward the right." See McNeily, "Barksdale's Mississippi Brigade," 234. NPS Ranger Karlton Smith estimated about 12:45 p.m. in his study. Smith, "To Consider Every Contingency," 108-109.

Captain Johnston's duty as a reconnoitering officer presumed that he knew how to guide Longstreet into position. Johnston later claimed, "no other instructions were given me," when Lee assigned him to join Longstreet. The captain "fully understood," however, that he was to assist the First Corps commander "in any way that I could." By Johnston's account, "we did not move off very promptly, nor was our march at all rapid. It did not strike me that Gen. Longstreet was in a hurry to get into position. It might have been that he thought hurry was unnecessary." According to McLaws, Johnston "came to me and said he was ordered to conduct me on the march." McLaws and Johnston then rode some distance ahead of Kershaw's Brigade.³

Longstreet understood clearly that Johnston was the guide. Yet, the general made the questionable choice to ride with Hood's Division near the middle of the column, rather than remain in front with McLaws. Whether or not he was irritated by pursuing Lee's plan of attack, Longstreet later justified his actions with an unconvincing explanation that he "was relieved for the time from the march."⁴

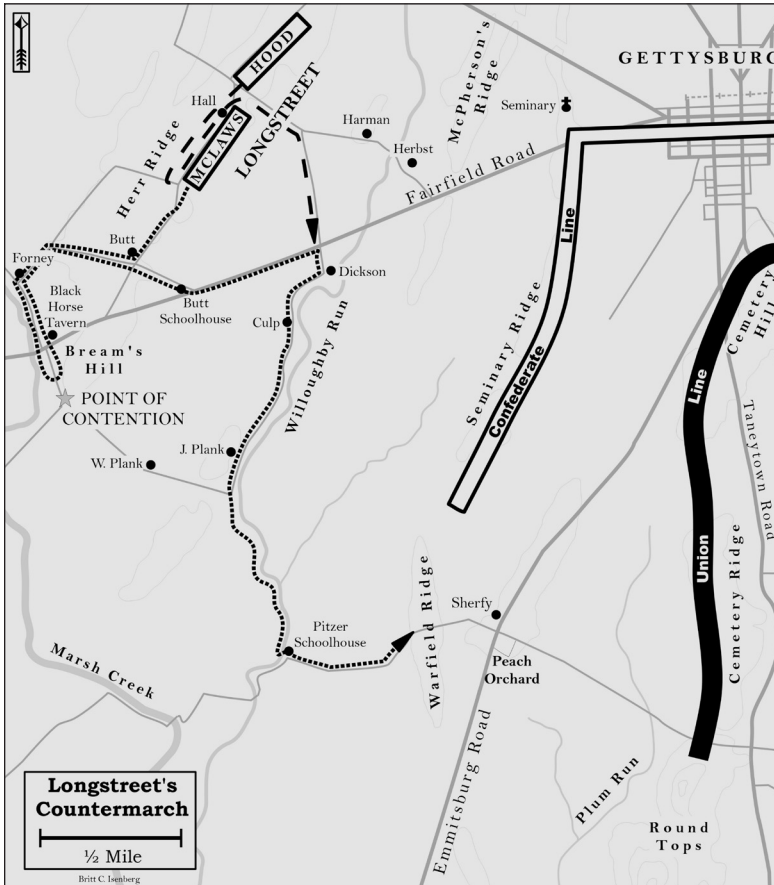
Longstreet's troops moved to the Black Horse Tavern Road, which passed by the stone tavern of the same name, along the west side of Herr Ridge. The ridge offered concealment from the prying eyes of Union signalmen on Little Round Top. After passing the tavern and crossing the Fairfield Road, McLaws and Captain Johnston soon led Longstreet's column to an elevation that rose to a height of about 40 feet. From this hill, McLaws observed Union signal flags "in rapid motion" roughly three miles away on Little Round Top. McLaws halted his division and rode with Johnston "rapidly around the neighborhood to see if there was any road by which we could go into position without being seen." Failing to locate any immediate alternatives, McLaws rejoined his command and met up with Longstreet, who had ventured forward to ascertain the cause of the delay.⁵

It was a hot afternoon and the delay added to a growing sense of frustration. Longstreet inquired, "What is the matter?" McLaws explained, "we can't go on

3 Samuel R. Johnston to Lafayette McLaws, June 27, 1892, S.R. Johnston MSS, transcribed copy on file GNMP; McLaws, "Gettysburg," *SHSP*: 7: 69.

4 OR, 27/2: 358; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 366. Longstreet's report of July 27 stated, "Engineers, sent out by the commanding general and myself, guided us by a road which would have completely disclosed the move." Longstreet added in his memoirs (366), "General Lee rode with me a mile or more."

5 McLaws, "Gettysburg," *SHSP*, 7: 69; Longstreet, "Lee's Right Wing at Gettysburg," *Battles and Leaders*, 3: 340.



this route. . . without being seen by the enemy,” and took his corps commander to the troublesome hill. When they reached the top, Longstreet surveyed the terrain and agreed. “Why this won’t do. Is there no way to avoid it?” Captain Johnston offered no answers, but McLaws had reconnoitered the ground earlier that morning, despite Longstreet’s request to the contrary. McLaws suggested an alternate route, but informed Longstreet that the only way to arrive was “by going back – by countermarching.” Longstreet agreed, although Kershaw noticed that Longstreet and McLaws were “both manifesting considerable irritation.”⁶

Colonel Alexander meanwhile became curious about the infantry’s “non-arrival.” He rode back and found the column halted at the hill. Alexander

⁶ McLaws, “Gettysburg,” *SHSP*, 7: 69; Kershaw, “Kershaw’s Brigade at Gettysburg,” *Battles and Leaders*, 3: 331.

indicated the visible trail that his artillery had used to easily bypass the signal station, but the infantrymen would not follow it. "For some reason, which I cannot now recall," wrote Alexander, "they would not turn back and follow the tracks of my guns, and I remember a long and tiresome waiting; and at length there came an order to turn back and take another road around by 'Black Horse Tavern.'" Why Longstreet and McLaws were unable to follow Alexander's trail remains a mystery, but Longstreet's need for concealment took precedence over speed as his infantry retraced their steps back nearly to the starting point.⁷

Longstreet's difficulties were far from finished. General Hood's division had been following McLaws, but as the latter began to countermarch, the divisions became intermingled. Hood started to crowd into McLaws's rear and created some confusion. To solve the problem, Longstreet proposed that McLaws allow Hood to go first and consequently lead the attack. However, McLaws protested and refused to concede the honor. Longstreet consented and Hood remained in the rear. The countermarch required McLaws's infantry to essentially turn around and pass the head of Hood's waiting column. Nonetheless, this solution did not eliminate every problem. Colonel Cabell's artillery battalion, part of McLaws's command, found themselves cut off by Hood's men and had to await their passing before rejoining their division. Evander Law, one of Hood's brigade commanders, described the countermarch as one of "many vexatious delays" that plagued Longstreet's movements that day.⁸

Kershaw, whose brigade remained in the lead, described the situation as one in which his men "moved back to the place where we had rested during the morning, and thence by a country road to Willoughby Run, then dry, and down that to the school-house beyond Pitzer's." McLaws recalled, "very considerable difficulty, owing to the rough character of the country in places

7 Alexander, "Letter From General E. P. Alexander," *SHSP*, 4: 101-102; Alexander, *Military Memoirs*, 392; Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 236-237. The question as to why the infantry did not follow Alexander's route has long puzzled and been debated by Gettysburg students, often disproportionately to its actual importance. Alexander's writings leave no doubt that his trail was visible but that there were reasons for not following it. In *Fighting for the Confederacy*, he wrote, "Of course I told the officers at the head of the column of the route my artillery had followed- which was easily seen- but there was no one with authority to vary the orders they were under." If accurate, then this means he did not speak to either Longstreet or McLaws. It is also typically assumed that McLaws stopped at the same hill that Alexander bypassed, although this is not explicitly stated in Alexander's accounts.

8 McLaws, "Gettysburg," *SHSP*, 7: 69; Law, "The Struggle for 'Round Top,'" *Battles and Leaders*, 3: 320. Henry Cabell recalled that in this movement, "my battalion was cut off by Hood's Division and we were compelled to wait until his division passed." Cabell, "A Visit to the Battle-field of Gettysburg," *VHS*, 3.

and the fences and ditches we had to cross, the countermarch was effected, and my troops were moving easily forward along a road with fences on the side not giving room enough for a company front, making it necessary to break files to the rear.” Evidently, Longstreet and his lieutenants did not solicit Captain Johnston’s advice during this operation. Marching over unfamiliar ground, with no one to guide them, resulted in additional delays.⁹

Longstreet’s post-war critics accused him of moving too slowly to the battlefield, arriving too late in the day, and thus contributing to the subsequent unfavorable outcome. The estimated hours of Longstreet’s march were from 12:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. In total, the head of Longstreet’s column travelled slightly more than five miles. The need to countermarch, or turn around and proceed to an alternate route, added approximately two and a half miles to the day’s movements.¹⁰

The march was not at a particularly rapid pace, but it was not excessively slow, given the afternoon’s heat and road conditions. Without the countermarch, Longstreet’s infantry would have likely arrived opposite the Peach Orchard sometime before 2:00 p.m. The countermarch and the time lost waiting added at least one hour, and probably more, to the Confederate movements. This extra time allowed Meade to examine his left flank and begin deployment of infantry and artillery to support Sickles. Whether this was a deciding factor in the final outcome can never be conclusively proven, but the additional minutes worked in the Army of the Potomac’s favor.¹¹

9 Kershaw, “Kershaw’s Brigade at Gettysburg,” *Battles and Leaders*, 3: 332; McLaws, “Gettysburg,” *SHSP*, 7: 69; McNeily, “Barksdale’s Mississippi Brigade,” 234. Also see Kershaw’s description in Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, 1: 454.

10 The countermarch’s actual route is uncertain, but it is generally assumed here that the column backtracked from Blackhorse Tavern, worked their way some distance back up the western side of Herr Ridge, cut across to the Fairfield Road, and then continued to a road along the banks of Willoughby Run, where they marched to the Millerstown Road intersection. Using reasonable approximations for Longstreet’s actual marching distances, including the countermarch, we estimate that the total actual march for Kershaw’s head of column was about five and a quarter miles. Had they remained on the Black Horse Tavern Road and not turned around for an alternate route, then Kershaw’s total marching distance would have been about two and three quarter miles. Thus, the countermarch added an incremental two and a half miles, plus the time lost waiting at the troublesome hill. These are estimates given the uncertainty of both the starting point and the actual route used.

11 Some pundits have proposed that Longstreet hit the Union left at “just the right time” thanks to Sickles’s actions. That logic ignores the fact that a delayed Confederate attack gave the Sixth Corps time to arrive on the field, gave Meade the opportunity to inspect his own left, allowed for the Fifth Corps to better support the left, and bought additional time for Union artillery reserves to be called upon. Other than waiting for Law’s arrival, these are

While Longstreet's men awkwardly navigated the roads through the back-country, Sickles responded to Hunt's warning about occupying the Emmitsburg Road, particularly "if the enemy already held the wood in its front." Sickles ordered Birney to send four companies of Colonel Hiram Berdan's elite 1st U.S. Sharpshooters, a total of approximately 100 men, plus an additional 210 infantrymen from the 3rd Maine regiment, to reconnoiter Pitzer's Woods on the west side of the Emmitsburg Road. Berdan described the mission as one "to feel the enemy, and to discover their movements, if possible."¹²

Berdan marched down the Emmitsburg road "some distance beyond our extreme left and deployed the sharpshooters in a line running nearly east and west." He then moved his men northward. Lieutenant Colonel Casper Trepp complained that every move the Sharpshooters made was within "plain view of the enemy," and as they marched, "the enemy must have seen every man from the time we reached the road until we entered the woods." Even worse, Colonel Moses Lakeman of the 3rd Maine halted on the Emmitsburg Road and gave the Confederates yet another opportunity to watch their deployment. "For this violation of rules of secret expeditions we paid dearly," grumbled Trepp.¹³

Berdan's reconnaissance party entered Pitzer's Woods from the south, and soon collided with Confederate skirmishers among the trees and undergrowth. "We soon came upon the enemy," Berdan reported, "and drove them sufficiently to discover three columns in motion in rear of the woods, changing direction, as it were, by the right flank." Their opponents were three Alabama regiments, the 8th, 10th, and 11th, in General Cadmus Wilcox's Brigade from Anderson's Division of Hill's Third Corps. General Anderson had ordered Wilcox to secure

several reasons why Lee and Longstreet could have benefitted from launching their attack one to two hours earlier in the day. It is, of course, all speculation since it did not happen.

12 Hunt, "The Second Day at Gettysburg," *Battles and Leaders*, 3: 302; OR, 27/1: 482, 515; Marcot, "Berdan Sharpshooters at Gettysburg," *Gettysburg Magazine 1*, 37. Birney (27/1: 482) reported the start time as 12:00 p.m., Berdan reported about 11:00 am (27/1: 515). Hunt takes credit for suggesting the reconnaissance in *Battles and Leaders*. His post-battle Official Report does not discuss the matter. Henry Tremain suggested that the reconnaissance was also influenced by the fear that the Confederates could use the Millerstown cross-road to hit the left of any Third Corps troops or trains who might be arriving from Emmitsburg. See Tremain, *Two Days of War*, 45-48.

13 OR, 27/1: 515-517. This would have initially put the command in Biesecker's Woods south of the Millerstown Road, although Birney's report stated that the group used a more direct route via the Millerstown Road to reach Warfield / Seminary Ridge. "They advanced from the peach orchard out the Millerstown road, and entered the woods in order to flank the enemy." See OR, 27/1: 482.

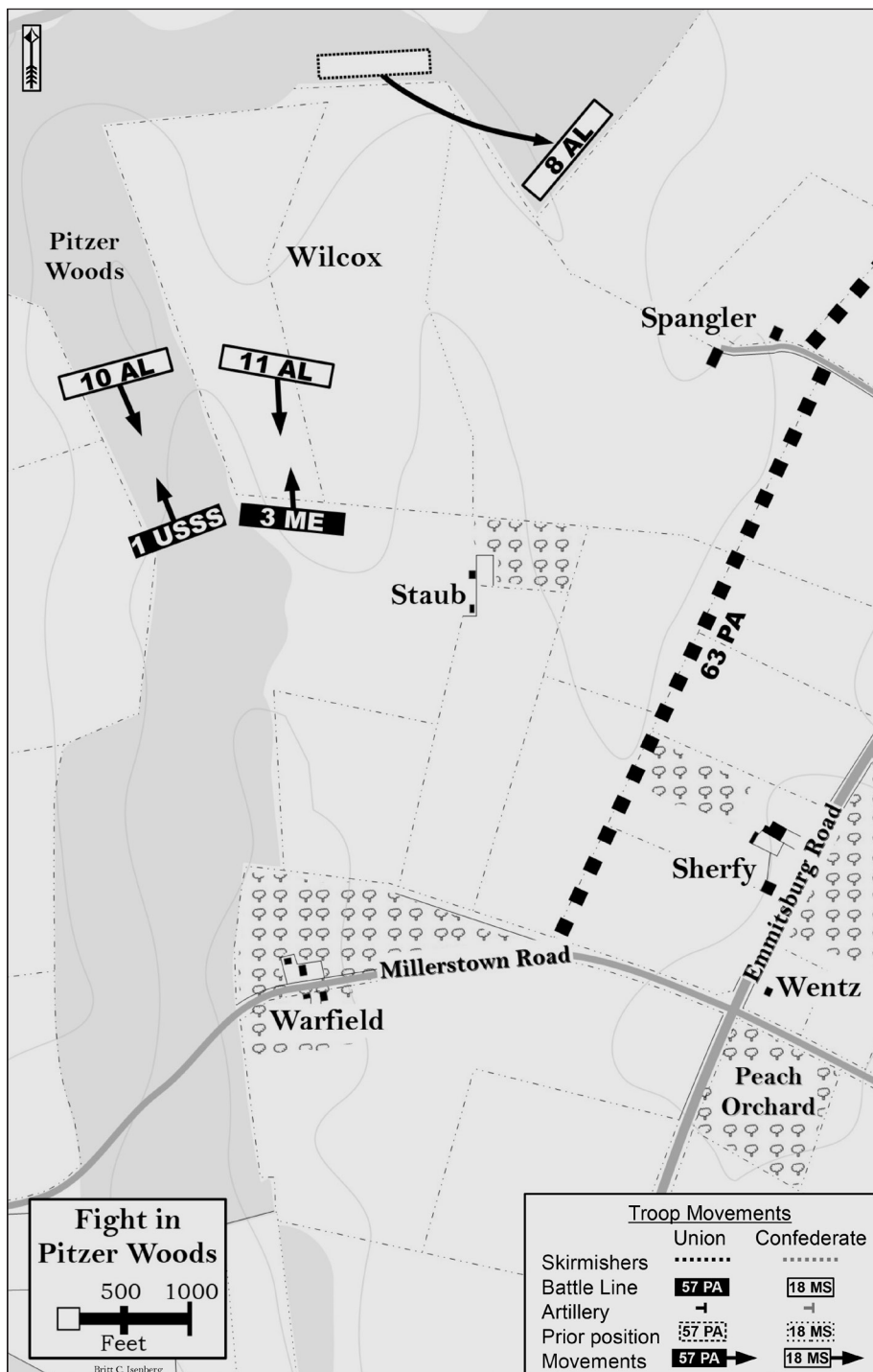
a position on the division's right. This effectively placed the Alabamians on the extreme right of the Confederate army as they awaited Longstreet's arrival. Wilcox refused his right flank to the south and southeast in the direction of the Peach Orchard and Pitzer's Woods. Like his Yankee counterparts, Wilcox was uncertain if the enemy already occupied these woods. He ordered the 10th Alabama into the woods, and directed the 11th to form in an open field on their left. As the regiments advanced behind a line of skirmishers, they collided with Berdan. Although this was unintended, Wilcox's movements gave the Northerners the misleading impression that a significant Confederate force was advancing toward the Emmitsburg Road.¹⁴

The U.S. Sharpshooters drew first blood. Wilcox's men advanced about 300 yards before receiving "a heavy volley of musketry on its right flank and rear from the enemy, concealed behind ledges of rock and trees in the woods on its right." The 3rd Maine had been initially behind the sharpshooters, but once the skirmish commenced, they moved to the front line and added more firepower. Colonel Lakeman led the 3rd Maine into position and "instantly formed my regiment under a heavy fire from the enemy, which we returned with a good will." The Maine men "labored under a decided disadvantage," however, because Trepp's sharpshooters had taken positions behind trees, thus leaving the 3rd Maine in open and exposed positions. "We attacked them vigorously on the flank," Berdan reported, "and from our having come upon them very unexpectedly, and getting close upon them, we were enabled to do great execution, and threw them for a time into confusion."¹⁵

The confusion that Berdan observed was probably within the 11th Alabama. The regiment took most of the initial fire and retreated several hundred yards toward a woodlot on Henry Spangler's farm. The 8th Alabama had already formed there in a lane near the wood's edge. As the gunfire became "very brisk," the sharpshooters rushed impetuously after the 11th Alabama and found themselves in an open field between the woodlots. Trepp's boys "drove the enemy about 300 yards, when he made a stand behind a rail fence." The 10th Alabama poured a return volley into the Federals, driving them back into the cover of Pitzer's Woods. Berdan acknowledged that his opponents "soon rallied, however, and attacked us, when, having accomplished the object of

14 OR, 27/1: 482, 515, 27/2: 613, 617; Marcot, "Berdan Sharpshooters at Gettysburg," *Gettysburg Magazine* 1, 37; Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The Second Day*, 98-99.

15 OR, 27/2: 617, 27/1: 507, 515.



the reconnaissance, I withdrew under cover of the woods, bringing off most of our wounded.”¹⁶

Wilcox boasted that a counter-charge by the 10th Alabama “broke the enemy’s line, and they fled precipitately from the woods, leaving 20 or 25 dead and twice that number wounded and prisoners.” The Union forces fell back to the east side of the Emmitsburg Road. Berdan’s mission was over, and it confirmed that Rebel soldiers indeed infested Pitzer’s Woods. The U.S. Sharpshooters suffered approximately 20 casualties, while the 3rd Maine added another 48 losses. Amid their hasty retreat, the Federals left some of the wounded on the field. These men were the day’s first significant casualties in the fight for the Emmitsburg Road.¹⁷

Little Round Top’s greatest value was as an observation point, and the troops manning the Army of the Potomac’s signal station witnessed most of the action in Pitzer’s Woods. Signal Officer Aaron Jerome sent a message to headquarters at 11:45 a.m. stating that Confederate skirmishers were advancing from the west. Ten minutes later, Jerome followed with another, more ominous message, “The rebels are in force, and our skirmishers give way. One mile west of Round Top signal station, the woods are full of them.” At 1:30 p.m., the station added, “A heavy column of enemy’s infantry, about 10,000 strong, is moving from opposite our extreme left toward our right.”¹⁸

This last message seemingly confirmed fears that Lee planned to move against Meade’s right flank. What the signal officer observed, however, was actually a portion of Longstreet’s column countermarching away from the vicinity of Blackhorse Tavern, via a by-road on Herr Ridge. The signalmen on Little Round Top remained unaware that, after the Confederate column passed from sight, Longstreet’s men changed direction again at Willoughby Run and headed toward the Union left. Ironically, the great efforts that

16 Ibid., 27/1: 515, 517.

17 Ibid., 27/1: 482, 507; 27/2: 617; Pfan, *Gettysburg: The Second Day*, 100-101; Marcot, “Berdan Sharpshooters at Gettysburg,” *Gettysburg Magazine* 1, 37. General Birney reported (27/1: 482) some 60 killed and wounded in the action. Colonel Lakeman (27/1: 507) admitted the 3rd Maine was “somewhat confused” in retreat and “I was obliged to leave my dead and seriously wounded on the field.” One sharpshooter wrote home, “We had to fight there awhile as usual, which, of course, was absurd (a few skirmishers fighting a line of battle.) We have done so much of late that they expect wonders of us.” See Murray, *Letters from Gettysburg*, 82.

18 OR, 27/3: 487- 488. The timing of this action creates problems with Alexander’s assertion that he parked his artillery battalion in the valley of Willoughby Run at about 12:00 p.m. He might have only been 700-800 yards away during this fight, and possibly even behind Berdan’s lines. However, if he arrived closer to 1:00 p.m. then the likelihood increases that he might have missed this fight, which he never described witnessing or even hearing.

Longstreet and McLaws undertook to avoid the signal station's detection did have some effect.

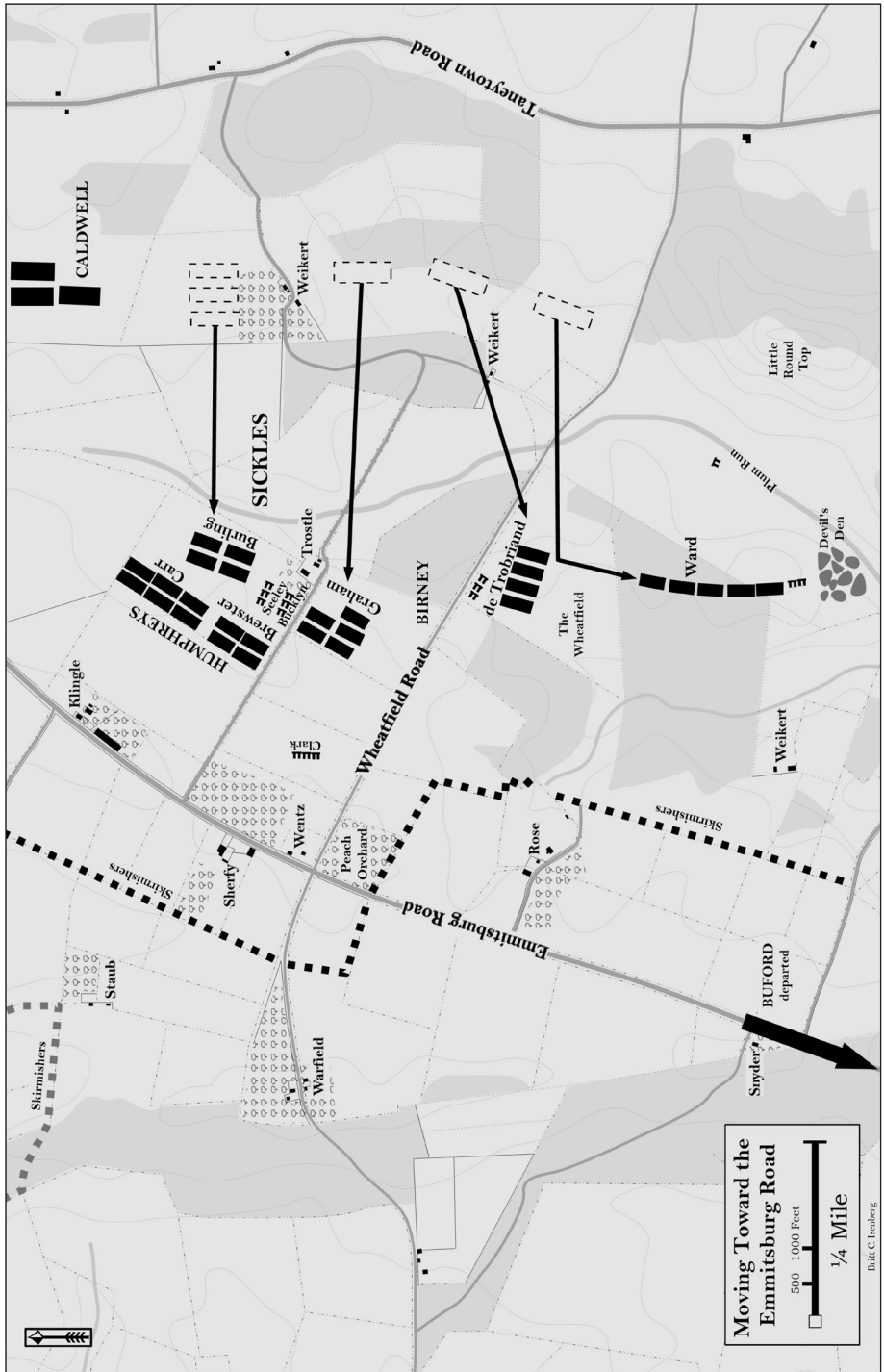
During this time, Sickles's anxiety was further intensified by the removal of Buford's cavalry screen from the army's left flank. The horsemen had witnessed the opening of Berdan's firefight and Colonel Thomas Devin, commander of Buford's Second Brigade, dismounted two squadrons to support the sharpshooters. Devin was not alone as artillery Lieutenant John Calef made dispositions to man his guns and "receive the enemy, who were driving our skirmishers rapidly." Before Buford's men could engage, however, they received orders to "collect all the trains in the vicinity of Taneytown and take them down to Westminster."¹⁹

Meade expected Major General Alfred Pleasonton, commander of the army's Cavalry Corps, to replace Buford along the Emmitsburg Road with additional troopers but none were forthcoming. Upon learning of Buford's departure, an "exceedingly annoyed" Meade notified Pleasonton at 12:50 p.m. that "the patrols and pickets upon the Emmitsburg road must be kept on as long as our troops are in position." Another hour passed before Pleasonton directed Brigadier General David M. Gregg, commanding the cavalry's Second Division, to bring forward replacements for Buford. As events unfolded, support from Gregg never materialized. As a result, Sickles was justifiably alarmed over the lack of a cavalry screen in his front.²⁰

Colonel Berdan stated that it was about 2:00 p.m. when he returned to Cemetery Ridge and reported his findings to Birney, who in turn notified Sickles, "three columns of their forces were found marching to our left." It was a pivotal culmination of the morning's events. With Buford's withdrawal, Berdan's information provided the final straw for Sickles. Ironically, Henry Hunt had counseled against occupying the Emmitsburg Road if the Rebels

19 Ibid., 27/1: 939, 1032. Devin (27/1: 939) reported, "While I was engaged reconnoitering in rear of the enemy's right, our sharpshooters became engaged with a division of the enemy advancing to feel our lines in front of my position. I immediately dismounted and deployed two squadrons in support of Berdan's Sharpshooters (who were engaged in my front), and formed the brigade into line on the left of the First, with one section of Tidball's battery in position." Calef's report (27/1: 1032) added, "We had hardly got into position when an order came from General Buford for me to follow with my battery the First Brigade, of his division, and march with it to Taneytown, Md., for supplies and forage." Also see Wittenberg, "The Truth About the Withdrawal of Brig. Gen. John Buford's Cavalry," *Gettysburg Magazine* 37, 71-77 and Petrucci, "John Buford at Gettysburg," *America's Civil War*, 37.

20 OR, 27/3: 490; Meade, *Life and Letters*, 2: 71. Buford's withdrawal, and Pleasonton's failure to replace him, has been the subject of much debate. For a summary, see Wittenberg, "The Devil's to Pay: John Buford at Gettysburg, A History and Walking Tour."



Moving Toward the
Emmitsburg Road

500 1000 Feet

1/4 Mile

Brig. C. Henberg

occupied Pitzer's Woods. Sickles reacted to the Rebel presence at Pitzer's by pursuing the opposite of Hunt's advice. Sickles weighed the perceived lack of support from headquarters, and he believed he had confirmation that the enemy was moving toward his left flank. If Sickles wanted to prevent the Confederates from occupying the Emmitsburg Road ridge, then this was his final opportunity to act.²¹

Birney received orders from Sickles "to change my front to meet the attack." In order to do this, Birney advanced his left some 500 yards, and pivoted his right "so as to rest on the Emmitsburg road at the peach orchard." In front of Little Round Top, Ward's brigade became the left of Birney's so-called "line" holding a position on Houck's Ridge and along the large rock formations of Devil's Den. To Ward's right, and in the center of Birney's division, Colonel Regis de Trobriand's brigade took position near a non-descript wheat field on the George Rose farm. Graham's brigade became the division's right, and Birney posted them along the Emmitsburg Road near the Sherfy and Wentz properties.²²

Graham's brigade consisted of six Pennsylvania infantry regiments totaling slightly more than 1,500 men. After advancing from the fields near Cemetery

21 OR, 27/1: 482, 514. Although Berdan had not actually discovered Longstreet's attack column, all that Sickles and his subordinates knew at this moment was that enemy troops were moving in their direction. They misinterpreted Berdan's intelligence to still arrive at the correct conclusion. Unfortunately the significance of Berdan's firefight, and the relevance to Sickles's actions, has been historically muddied by inflated post-war claims that Berdan had stumbled upon and delayed Longstreet's main attack. The sharpshooters' regimental history claimed that their mission had "stopped the advance of 30,000 foes. No greater display of heroism, no more self-sacrificing spirit of patriotism can be cited in the annals of war . . . surely, it may be fairly said to be a turning point in the Rebellion." Post-war speeches such as the one that James Longstreet gave at Gettysburg's 25th anniversary reunion only added to the fantastic tales. "The firing in question saved Sickles and the day. It caused me a loss of forty minutes, and could I have saved five of those minutes, the battle would have gone against Meade on the second day." Of course, any claims that Berdan directly delayed Longstreet are patently false. The sight of three Alabama regiments must have been disconcerting to Berdan's forces, but it is unlikely that they could have been mistaken for "30,000 foes." See Marcot, "Berdan Sharpshooters at Gettysburg," *Gettysburg Magazine* 1, 39. Harry Pfanz argued that the morning skirmishing should have left "no doubt that there were Confederates in Spangler's Woods. . . . Thus the only new information that Berdan's men could have provided was that the Confederates in some force were moving into the north end of Pitzer's Woods. Berdan might have assumed more and told a greater tale, but that is all his expedition uncovered and all he could rightly report. He could have seen nothing of Longstreet's corps, for it was out of his sight. His force might have delayed Wilcox's brigade in occupying its position on Anderson's right, but this was a meaningless achievement." See Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The Second Day*, 101-102. The point is that Berdan did tell more, and the Third Corps leadership did assume more. They assumed, correctly, that this confirmed Confederate movements toward their left.

22 OR, 27/1: 482-483.

Ridge, they formed a right angle that faced south and west at the intersection of the Wheatfield and Emmitsburg roads near the Wentz farm. The 141st and 68th Pennsylvania regiments faced south along a roughly 200 yard front on the north side of the Wheatfield Road. To the right of the 68th, and fronting west along the Emmitsburg Road for about 350 yards, the line extended north. From left to right, the alignment consisted of the 114th, 57th, and 105th Pennsylvania regiments. The 63rd Pennsylvania remained on the skirmish line west of the Emmitsburg Road beyond the Sherfy house. Several companies of the 105th Pennsylvania "Wildcats" supported the 63rd Pennsylvania. The main body of the 105th formed Graham's right and ended the brigade's formation at the farm lane leading to the Abraham Trostle residence. This lane, now modern United States Avenue, intersected the Emmitsburg Road between the Wentz and Daniel Klinge properties. The lane ran east from the Emmitsburg Road toward the Trostle farm and then to Cemetery Ridge beyond. Sickles established his headquarters at the Trostle farm, about 600 yards east of the Emmitsburg Road.²³

It was not long before the commanders began to move their chess pieces around the field. During the earlier skirmishing, Birney ordered the 99th Pennsylvania from Ward's brigade to move in support of the 3rd Maine. Afterward, the 99th rejoined their brigade when Ward moved into position on Houck's Ridge.²⁴

23 Busey and Martin, *Strengths and Losses*, 131; Floyd, *Commanders and Casualties*, 18; OR, 27/1: 504; Haynes, *A History of the Second Regiment*, 169-170; Craft, *History of the 141st Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 119; Scott, *History of the One Hundred and Fifth Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 82; Imhof, *Gettysburg Day Two*, 10-15. The Daniel Klinge (alternately spelled Klingel) farm was about 400 yards north of the Sherfy house and on the opposite side of the Emmitsburg Road. The Klingles' location played a prominent part in the subsequent fighting. The house and a barn remain on the site today as part of Gettysburg National Military Park.

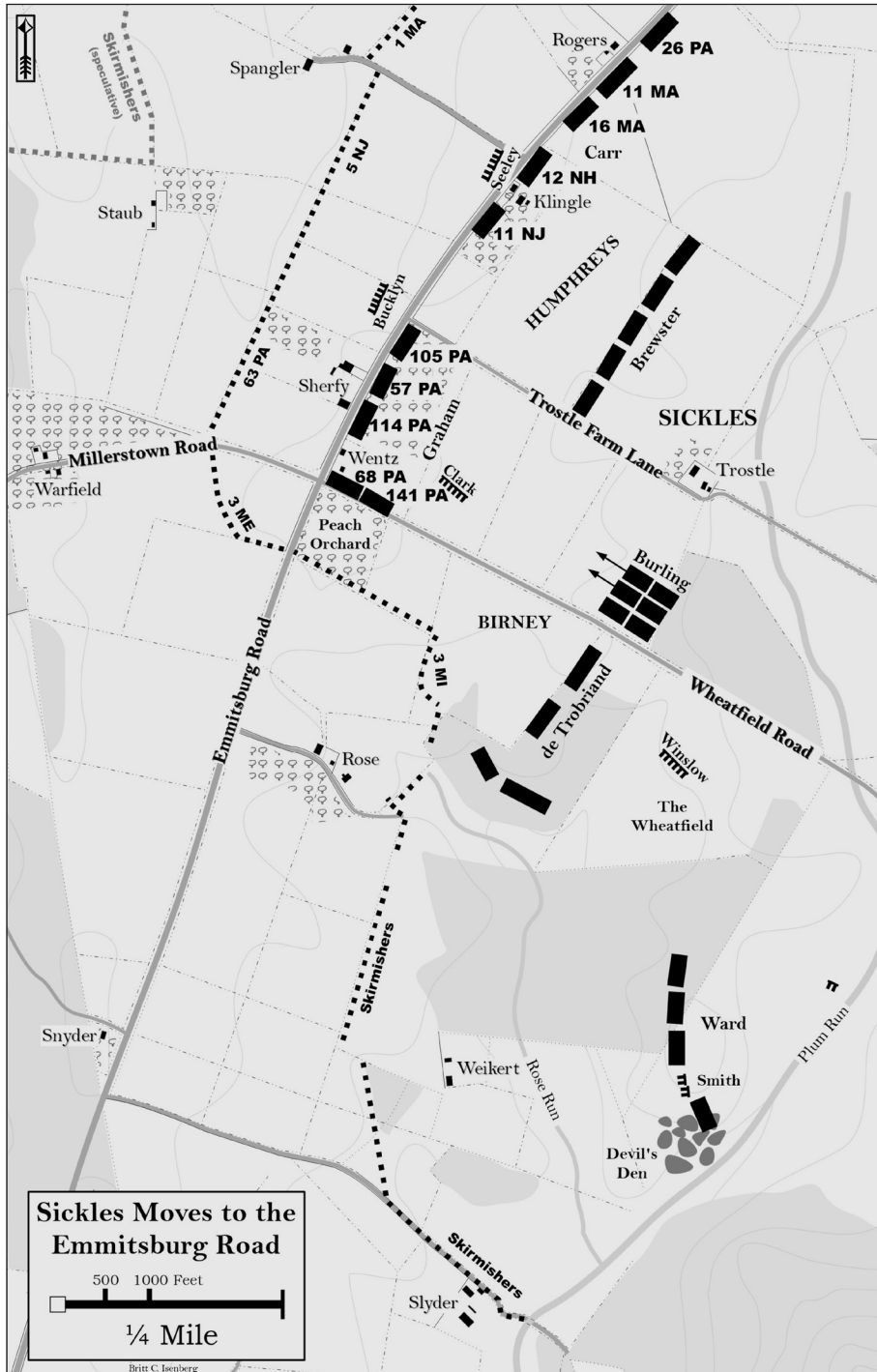
24 OR, 27/1: 513. Some interpretations have two other regiments from Ward's brigade, the 20th Indiana and 86th New York, joining the 99th PA along the Emmitsburg Road that morning. Major John Moore of the 99th (OR, 27/1: 513) reported being ordered by Birney, "to a position as support to the Third Maine Regiment, which was engaged in skirmishing with the enemy on the Emmitsburg road. This position I held for over an hour, when General Ward advanced the balance of the brigade, joined on my right, changed front, and moved farther to the left, as the enemy was massing his forces and moving on our left flank." Lieut. Col. Benjamin Higgins, 86th NY (OR, 27/1: 511), reported sending 35 men forward in the morning to demolish fences and walls to the Emmitsburg Road. This did not involve the entire regiment and they returned by 11:00 a.m. At noon, Higgins described advancing into the middle of a wheat field, which reads like the preliminary movements of the brigade to Houck's Ridge. Finally, Lt. Col. William Taylor of the 20th IN (OR, 27/1: 506) succinctly wrote, "On the morning of the 2d, the regiment was moved to the extreme left, to support the Ninety-ninth Pennsylvania and other troops then in the advance." Thus, it seems likely that the 99th Pennsylvania and perhaps the 20th Indiana were in the Peach Orchard vicinity

The 3rd Maine, however, was also from Ward's brigade and remained near the Peach Orchard upon their return from the firefight in Pitzer's Woods. This time, Birney deployed the 3rd Maine on Graham's left, in order to help cover a gap between the Peach Orchard and Wheatfield. Other examples of regiments being detached from their brigades occurred over the course of the afternoon. The net impact of these various separations proved detrimental to Third Corps command and control during the coming battle, caused confusion among the men, and disrupted the cohesion of the brigades themselves.²⁵

General Humphreys's Second Division extended the Third Corps defenses north of the Trostle lane. Their move to the Emmitsburg Road occurred in stages. Humphreys spent much of the morning "massed" on Cemetery Ridge, with Birney on the left and Hancock's Second Corps on the right. Then at about noon, "or a little after, by direction of General Sickles," Humphreys later testified, "my division was formed some 400 or 500 yards in front of the position in which it had remained during the night." This was located "in a hollow" and "near the foot of the westerly slope" of Cemetery Ridge. Humphreys, an outsider in the Sickles-Birney-Graham clique, was the only

that morning. Their activities demonstrated the attention that Birney paid to this area, and also the piece-meal movements of regiments in brigades such as Ward's, but these regiments otherwise played no material role in the fight for the Peach Orchard.

25 The 3rd Maine deployment is often described as a skirmish line connecting with another skirmish line of the 3rd Michigan in front of the Wheatfield. See Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The Second Day*, 304; Laino, *Gettysburg Campaign Atlas*, 194; Imhof, *Gettysburg: Day Two*, 13. Colonel Moses Lakeman's OR does not describe a skirmish formation by the entire regiment. "I received an order from General Birney to take position in a peach orchard on the right of my previous one, and accordingly moved my regiment there and occupied it. Here I was enabled several times during the day to repulse the enemy's skirmishers (who seemed very anxious to drive us from it), and also to seriously harass the left flank of their advancing columns to the position which the other regiments of the brigade were holding, changing my front as circumstances required." See OR, 27/1: 507-508. The account in *Maine at Gettysburg* likewise does not indicate a skirmish line. "There to the left of Graham the regiment went into line of battle. . . . The regiment was posted behind the fence that bounded the Peach Orchard on the southwest side, its right resting along the east side of the Emmitsburg road." See *Maine at Gettysburg*, 130. The regiment's GNMP battlefield monument in the Peach Orchard simply states, "Fought here in the afternoon." Neither Birney (OR, 27/1: 483) nor Colonel Edwin Pierce of the 3rd Michigan (OR, 27/1: 524) who would have connected with Maine's left, describe the 3rd Maine as being in a skirmish line. John Bachelder wrote that the 3rd Maine "lay on the south side of the peach orchard, in front of a battery." In describing 3rd Michigan's actions, Bachelder noted that regiment's skirmish line "extended to the peach orchard, where it connected with that of the 3d Maine." This only implies that the 3rd Maine had a skirmish line, but does not say that the entire regiment was on the line as is often depicted. See Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, 3: 1982-1983. The subsequent deployment of the 3rd Michigan will be discussed later in the narrative.



West Pointer in the group. He recalled specifically that Sickles never sent for him and he had “no knowledge” of Birney’s position or intentions.²⁶

Sometime after 1:00 p.m., the Excelsior Brigade’s 73rd New York under Major Michael Burns moved in advance of the main body toward Daniel Klingle’s farm along the Emmitsburg Road. Brigade commander Colonel William Brewster wrote that the New Yorkers marched “to the crest of the hill, about 250 yards in advance of the First Brigade [Carr’s], with instructions that, should the enemy attempt to take it, to hold it at all hazards.” A detachment of the 16th Massachusetts from General Carr’s brigade later relieved them. This advance was likely intended to increase visibility to movements on the west side of the Emmitsburg Road ridge, where the 1st Massachusetts remained on the skirmish line. According to that regiment’s Lieutenant Colonel Clark Baldwin, “troops could be seen moving into line of battle on the left as far as could be seen, which gave me plainly to understand that Gen. Sickles was preparing to defend his position or attack that of the enemy.”²⁷

Sickles soon detached Colonel George Burling’s Third Brigade from Humphreys, and gave Birney operational control over these six regiments. Presumably, this was to strengthen the Third Corps left against an assault on that sector of the line, but Burling’s departure left Humphreys with only Brewster and Carr’s brigades, totaling about 3,500 infantrymen. Humphreys moved his remaining division forward so that his “first line ran along the Emmitsburg road a short distance behind the crest upon which that road lies.” Although the loss of Burling diluted Humphreys’s infantry strength, Lieutenant Francis Seeley’s 4th US Artillery, Battery K, from the Third Corps Artillery Brigade, bolstered his defenses. Humphreys ordered Seeley to unlimber his six Napoleons on the right of Klingle’s log house.²⁸

26 OR, 27/1: 531; Hyde, *The Union Generals Speak*, 187-188; Humphreys, *Andrew Atkinson Humphreys: A Biography*, 192.

27 OR, 27/1: 543, 551, 558-559; Laino, *Gettysburg Campaign Atlas*, 168; Ladd, *The Bachelor Papers*, 1: 193. Brewster didn’t specify the time that the 73rd New York was relieved, only that it occurred before 5:30 p.m. The reports of Carr and 16th Massachusetts’s Captain Matthew Donovan suggest that it occurred around 4:00 p.m.

28 OR, 27/1: 532; Imhof, *Gettysburg Day Two*, 10-15; Hyde, *The Union Generals Speak*, 187-189; Busey and Martin, *Strengths and Losses*, 132. Humphreys reported that he “was directed” to move Burling’s Brigade “to the rear of the right of General Birney’s division, and make it subject to his order for support,” meaning that these orders must have come from Sickles. Humphreys also estimated that it was about 4:00 p.m. when he moved his division toward the Emmitsburg Road. This seems too late in the day to be accurate, but illustrates the passage of several hours. Burling’s brigade was initially massed in Trostle’s Woods, “a piece of woods west

General Carr's brigade occupied Humphreys's front line along the Emmitsburg Road, with Colonel Brewster in reserve. Joseph Carr was a 34-year-old native of Albany, New York. As a youth, his immigrant family had limited means, and he received a public school education. He was considered energetic and "displayed a strong taste for the military" at an early age. In 1849, Carr joined the militia and advanced to the rank of colonel. At the same time, in civilian life, he established himself in business as a tobacconist.

After the Civil War started, Carr helped recruit the 2nd New York Volunteer Infantry and the men elected him lieutenant colonel of the regiment under the command of Colonel George L. Willard. However, Willard still held a commission in the regular army and was unable to command volunteers. The regiment held a new election and chose Carr as their colonel. He spent much of 1861 in camp training with his men, but also led the regiment at Big Bethel, Virginia, in June. By early 1862, some newspapers touted him as a "model colonel" and speculated that he was destined for promotion to brigadier general. He commanded a brigade during the Seven Days and Second Bull Run. At Chancellorsville, Carr temporarily assumed division command after General Hiram Berry fell mortally wounded, but he returned to brigade command during the army's reorganization prior to Gettysburg.

Although Carr received a promotion to brigadier general in September 1862, the Senate failed to act on it and his commission expired. The Senate did not confirm his re-nomination until 1864, with an effective date of March 1863. Thus, Carr's status as a brigadier general was in some doubt during the Gettysburg campaign. His large side-whiskers and thick moustache cut a physically distinctive appearance. The assertion that "a profane or objectionable word was never heard from his lips," along with his use of the phrase "coup de soleil" to describe sunstroke in his Gettysburg report, suggested that he possessed a somewhat sensitive persona. His resume was impressive, and this self-made son of Irish immigrants often won the praise of his superiors.²⁹

of Little Round Top, and not far from the wheat field." Burling formed in massed columns, so they would be ready to move elsewhere when called upon, and awaited further instructions.

29 Carr biographical information: NARA Record Group 94, Letters Received by Commission Branch, C728, retrieved on fold3.com; *The Union Army*, VIII: 51-52; *New York State Bureau of Military Statistics, 3rd Annual Report of the Bureau of Military Statistics*, 49-61; "Our Newport News Correspondence," *New York Daily Herald*, January 17, 1862; *Dedication of the New York Auxiliary State Monument*, 148-149; OR.: 25/1: 445, 27/1: 542; "Gen. Joseph B. Carr Dead," *The New York Times*, February 25, 1895; Warner, *Generals in Blue*, 71-72; Tagg, *The Generals of*

Brigadier General Joseph Carr

LOC



However, Lieutenant Henry Blake of the brigade's 11th Massachusetts, who was witheringly critical of numerous general officers in his memoirs, relayed an allegation that has been generally accepted by historians as a reference to Carr:

One general in the division, well known for his cowardice, marched through the populous districts with much ostentation at the head of his brigade, and shouted orders in a pompous tone of authority to attract the notice of the crowd; while the soldiers were saying, 'It is perfectly safe to be in front now;' 'There won't be any fighting while he leads the brigade,' and similar sentences. This officer had taught dancing schools of a low character before the war; and the members of some companies would 'call off' the various changes, - 'Right and left,' 'All promenaded to the bar,' &c., whenever he rode by them, for the purpose of insulting him.³⁰

Whether Carr was a dancer or a fighter, on the afternoon of July 2, his men held a position along the Emmitsburg Road, well in front of the rest of the Army of the Potomac. There was a gap between the left of Carr's brigade and the right of Graham's men, so Brewster's 71st and 72nd New York regiments moved into position in between these units. Since Hancock's command remained on Cemetery Ridge, about 500 yards to the rear of Sickles's advanced line, Carr's right regiment, the 26th Pennsylvania, did not

Gettysburg, 75-77. Some sources list him as 35 years old at Gettysburg, but his date of birth was August 16, 1828.

30 Blake, *Three Years in the Army of the Potomac*, 200-201. Henry N. Blake was 22 years old when he enlisted from Dorchester MA as a sergeant in 1861. He was promoted to lieutenant in 1862. He received promotion to captain in April 1864, however he was also under arrest awaiting court-martial. In June 1864, Captain Blake was listed as absent / wounded to date from May 12. He mustered out in June 1864 as a captain while absent. Blake referred to himself as a captain in his post-war memoirs, and he is often referred to by this rank in the Gettysburg literature, although he was still a lieutenant in 1863. Henry N. Blake, CMSR, NARA (accessed on www.fold3.com); Henry Nichols Blake, www.civilwardata.com.

connect with the left of the Second Corps. In military parlance, Humphreys's right flank was "in the air." The 74th New York moved to Carr's right, but Brewster's 70th and 120th New York remained in reserve behind the first line. In no way did these dispositions fulfill Meade's expectation that the Third Corps would extend Hancock's left along Cemetery Ridge to Little Round Top.³¹

From their location on Cemetery Ridge, Hancock's men knew nothing of General Sickles's intentions. Josiah Favill, an officer on Brigadier General Samuel Zook's staff, recorded, "we stood to arms, on observing Sickles begin to advance and maneuver; after making several incomprehensible movements, his troops marched forward from in front of Round Top, and immediately brought on the action." Lieutenant William Wilson of Brigadier General John Caldwell's staff offered, "Many were the criticisms made and opinions expressed as to the comparative merits of the line he was directed to take and the one he selected." General Hancock admittedly admired "the spectacle, but I did not know the object of it." Such displays of large troop movements typically captured the hearts of military men, and Hancock allegedly remarked that Sickles's advance was "beautiful to look at," but added, "gentlemen they will not be there long."³²

Some of these criticisms undoubtedly took shape with the advantage of hindsight. Historians often ponder why Hancock and staff did not report Sickles's "incomprehensible movements" immediately to army headquarters. At that moment on July 2, however, no one in Meade's army, from the general's staff down to the company level, had a clear sightline across the entire field. As military men, they presumed that the Third Corps was carrying out orders, although the wisdom and nature of those orders may not have seemed evident.³³

31 OR, 27/1: 558, 566; Imhof, *Gettysburg Day Two*, 14-15.

32 Ladd, *The Bachelor Papers*, 2: 1194; Hyde, *The Union Generals Speak*, 214; Favill, *Diary of a Young Army Officer*, 245. Lieutenant Frank Haskell pontificated that Sickles "supposed he was doing for the best; but he was neither born nor bred a soldier. But one can scarcely tell what may have been the motives of such a man,— a politician, and some other things, exclusive of the Barton Key affair, - a man after show, and notoriety, and newspaper fame, and the adulation of the mob! O, there is a grave responsibility on those in whose hands are the lives of ten thousand men; and on those who put stars upon men's shoulders, too!" See Byrne and Weaver, *Haskell of Gettysburg*, 117.

33 Author Paul Bretzger examined a number of reasons why Sickles's advance could have gone unnoticed, or at least unreported. "Birney's half occurred behind the cover of trees, while Humphreys' movement was piecemeal and gradual until the last act, when it was too late to rectify." See Bretzger, *Observing Hancock at Gettysburg*, 81-90.

While Second Corps officers remained puzzled and critical, many Third Corps veterans viewed Sickles's actions more favorably. They saw their commander as a man of action who seized upon the needs of the moment. "General Sickles had one sterling quality of a good soldier—he was equal to an emergency," Major Thomas Rafferty argued, "and left as he now was to the exercise of his own judgment, he was prompt to act." Strategically, the new line forced "the enemy to develop his plan of attack, as our position there menaced any attempt he might make at turning our flank, and in fact compelled him to attack us, or suspend his movement and await our attack."³⁴

Afterwards, there emerged a point of contention regarding authorization for Birney and Humphreys to call upon others for support. Birney maintained that Sickles "informed me that a division from the Second [Corps] and one from the Fifth Corps had been ordered to be in readiness to support me." Humphreys argued essentially the same, insisting that Sickles permitted him to "draw support, should I need it" from General Caldwell's Second Corps division. Humphreys also asserted that Sickles "authorized" him to draw from the army's Artillery Reserve "should I require more." Humphreys then sent Hancock a message to inquire whether Caldwell's division was ready to assist him.³⁵

At headquarters, Meade recorded the initial arrival of his army's large Sixth Corps at 2:00 p.m. He then "immediately directed the Fifth Corps to move over to our extreme left," and placed the Sixth Corps in reserve for the right. Had Lee and Longstreet launched their assault at an earlier hour, the Sixth Corps would not have been on the field, and the Fifth Corps would not have been positioned to provide a timely defense of Meade's left. Whether this impacted the day's outcome remains speculative, but Confederate delays gave Meade's army more time to concentrate.³⁶

Also, although Sickles's men had not yet spotted Longstreet's divisions moving to their left, the earlier encounter with Wilcox in Pitzer's Woods, and subsequent occupation of the Emmitsburg Road, eliminated any element of surprise that Lee hoped would offer the Confederates an advantage. Sickles

34 Rafferty, "Gettysburg," *Personal Recollections of the War of the Rebellion*, 7-8.

35 OR, 27/1: 483, 27/1: 532; Hyde, *The Union Generals Speak*, 187-189. Humphreys was afterwards "under the impression that I sent a request to [Hancock] to throw forward some troops between my right and his left."

36 OR, 27/1: 116; Hyde, *The Union Generals Speak*, 253-254. It is also worth remembering that Meade and the Union commanders incorrectly believed that they were outnumbered, and that the Sixth Corps presence was a necessity before taking any decisive action.

and his officers knew that an attack along their line was imminent. Longstreet had no way of knowing it, but continued attempts at concealment on his part were wasted efforts.³⁷

Sometime around 3:00 p.m., Longstreet's two divisions approached the Millerstown Road and the western side of Warfield Ridge. The First Corps march into position took longer than expected and Longstreet certainly realized this fact. He rode up to Lafayette McLaws and asked, "How are you going in?" McLaws replied, "That will be determined when I can see what is in my front." Longstreet assured his subordinate, "There is nothing in your front; you will be entirely on the flank of the enemy." McLaws responded that he would continue until he arrived on the Union flank and "will face to the left and march on the enemy." Longstreet approved, "That suits me." He then rode away to attend to other duties.³⁸

On July 7, McLaws summarized the battle plan in a letter to his wife:

[W]e moved around Gettysburg towards the Emmitsburg road, to arrive at the Peach orchard, a small settlement with a very large Peach Orchard attached. The intention was to get in rear of the enemy who were supposed to be stationed principally in rear of Gettysburg or near of it. The report being that the enemy had but two regiments of infantry and one battery at the Peach orchard. On arriving at the vicinity of the Orchard, the enemy were discovered in greater force than was supposed.³⁹

Longstreet likely intended for McLaws to deploy his division in the low ground immediately south of the Peach Orchard. From there, he would pivot

37 Sickles alluded to this in his 1905 introduction to Helen Longstreet's *Lee and Longstreet at High Tide*. Certainly they would not have acted upon Berdan's intelligence and then still have been surprised by the appearance of Rebel infantry. See Sickles, "Introduction," *Lee and Longstreet at High Tide*, 23-24. Likewise, Longstreet also suggested in *Battles and Leaders* that he abandoned secrecy because he believed it likely that he had been discovered near Black Horse Tavern by the Union signal station on Little Round Top. "It seemed there was doubt again about the men being concealed, when I stated that I could see the signal station, and there was no reason why they could not see us. It seemed to me useless, therefore, to delay the troops any longer with the idea of concealing the movement, and the two divisions advanced." If that is true, then one wonders why Longstreet countermarched his column at all. See Longstreet, "Lee's Right Wing at Gettysburg," *Battles and Leaders*, 3: 340.

38 McLaws, "Gettysburg," *SHSP*, 7: 69. The southern extension of Seminary Ridge is also referred to as Warfield Ridge. This is named after African-American James Warfield who lived on the south side of the Millerstown Road and about 500 yards west of the Emmitsburg Road. The Warfield house still stands today.

39 Oeffinger, *A Soldier's General*, 195-196. As noted previously, the 1858 Adams County map represented the Peach Orchard as a separately named location. McLaws's description suggests that the Confederates were using this map in their movements.

on the Emmitsburg Road and attack with Hood's Division to follow. But, Lee designed the attack based upon an erroneous supposition. The left flank of the Army of the Potomac did not rest on the Emmitsburg Road.

Commenting from the Federal perspective, Henry Hunt understood this when he explained that Lee apparently "mistook the few troops on the Peach Orchard ridge in the morning for our main line, and that by taking it and sweeping up the Emmitsburg road under cover of his batteries, he expected to 'roll up' our lines to Cemetery Hill."⁴⁰

Adding to this fundamental flaw in the Confederate plan of attack, much had changed since Johnston's reconnaissance. Sickles now occupied the Emmitsburg Road. McLaws's column reached the western edge of Pitzer's Woods, and the Rebel general recalled, "one rapid glance showed them to be in force much greater than I had, and extending considerably beyond my right." McLaws rode forward to get a better look at the situation, "and the view presented astonished me, as the enemy was massed in my front, and extended to my right and left as far as I could see. . . . Thus was presented a state of affairs which was certainly not contemplated when the original plan or order of battle was given, and certainly was not known to General Longstreet a half hour previous."⁴¹

General Kershaw's brigade had remained in the lead throughout the march. As his command reached Pitzer's schoolhouse near the Millerstown Road, Longstreet directed him to advance the brigade, attack the enemy at the Peach Orchard, and "turn his flank." The corps commander expected Kershaw to cross the Emmitsburg Road, pivot north, and extend his brigade while keeping his left on the road as he swept the enemy out of their position. Kershaw began preparations for the attack and filed to the right (south) off of the Millerstown Road and behind a stone wall on Warfield Ridge. His main line formed for battle while his skirmishers engaged the enemy. However, Kershaw found the enemy "in superior force in the orchard, supported by artillery, with a main line of battle intrenched in the rear and extending to and upon the rocky mountain to his left far beyond the point at which his flank had supposed to rest." The capable South Carolinian knew that if he were to

40 Hunt, "The Second Day at Gettysburg," *Battles and Leaders*, 3: 300. Also see Cooksey, "Up the Emmitsburg Road," *Gettysburg Magazine* 26, 45-48, for an analysis of Longstreet's desire to "attack up the Emmitsburg Road." Cooksey proposed that the Confederates probably believed that the Union line ended along the Emmitsburg Road somewhere between the Rogers and Codori houses. In this scenario, the original Confederate plan called for McLaws to deploy in the low ground just south of the Peach Orchard before sweeping up the Emmitsburg Road.

41 McLaws, "Gettysburg," *SHSP*, 7: 69-71.

carry out his orders, and attack Sickles at the orchard, while keeping his left on the Emmitsburg Road, then he would expose his right and rear to other Yankee troops that stretched southeast toward the Round Tops. Kershaw communicated the situation to McLaws, and his men took cover behind the stone wall while awaiting further orders.⁴²

Longstreet was apparently unaware of the current state of affairs. Since McLaws had discovered the Federals in greater force than expected, he deployed two brigades in his front: Kershaw on the right, south of the Millerstown Road, and William Barksdale's Brigade on Kershaw's left, north of the road. He placed Paul Semmes and William Wofford's brigades in the rear in order to give depth to the attack. These deployments consumed time, and Longstreet sent staff officer Major Osmund Latrobe to find out why McLaws had not attacked, since there was supposed to be no one in his front except for "a regiment of infantry and a battery of artillery."⁴³

McLaws replied, presumably with growing irritation, that the Yankees were "in great force," supported by artillery, and their line "extended far to the right." Another message soon arrived from Longstreet repeating the orders. McLaws responded that the assault required careful preparation, and it was necessary for his own artillery to break up the enemy's before he ordered his infantry forward. McLaws requested that Longstreet "come to the front and see for himself."⁴⁴

Instead of a visit from his corps commander, yet another order arrived "peremptorily" for McLaws "to charge, the officer representing that General Lee was with General Longstreet, and joined in the order." At that point, McLaws had no choice but to tell Longstreet "that in five minutes I would be under way." However, as McLaws prepared to initiate what he described as "a simultaneous move of the whole line," yet another courier arrived from Longstreet, this time with orders to "wait until Hood got into position."⁴⁵

Although it took some time for him to do so, Longstreet became aware of the true tactical situation. This forced Longstreet to modify the original plan of attack. Without time to conduct a thorough reconnaissance, Longstreet

42 OR, 27/2: 367-368.

43 Oeffinger, *A Soldier's General*, 196; McLaws, "Gettysburg," *SHSP*, 7: 72; Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The Second Day*, 152-153.

44 McLaws, "Gettysburg," *SHSP*, 7: 72.

45 *Ibid.*; Oeffinger, *A Soldier's General*, 196. Longstreet omitted this exchange in his memoirs. See Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 366-367.

based his new orders on what was obviously visible from Warfield Ridge. The Southerners could see that the Union left extended farther than was expected, but they could not account for every Yankee regiment hidden behind woodlots or ridgelines on the field. As time slipped away, Longstreet ordered Hood's Division, still in position behind McLaws, to move to the Confederates' right. Lee later described Hood's revised objective as, "partially enveloping the enemy's left, which he was to drive in." Longstreet added that Hood's Division was "pressing upon" the Union's left, while McLaws was to do the same upon the enemy's "front." These revisions meant the Peach Orchard salient would be hit from two sides if Hood did his part to successfully "drive in" the enemy's left flank.⁴⁶

Federal artillery soon uncovered Hood's initial movements. For much of the morning, Captain Judson Clark had unlimbered Battery B, 1st New Jersey Light Artillery in a position midway between Sickles's Trostle farm headquarters and the Peach Orchard. His battery consisted of six 10-pound Parrott rifles, and during the afternoon Clark spotted enemy infantry moving in column across the Emmitsburg Road. Clark estimated their distance at roughly 1,400 yards from his left and front, well within range of his rifled guns. Under Sickles's direction, Clark opened fire with six or seven rounds of shell and case shot before the column disappeared from view. At this stage, Sickles and Longstreet's forces were simply too close to each other to make further concealment possible.⁴⁷

At around 3:00 p.m., with Clark's opening salvos likely reverberating on the horizon, Meade summoned his subordinates to headquarters for a meeting. Since skirmishing and artillery fire had increased along his front, Sickles requested that Meade excuse him from the meeting, "stating that the enemy were in great force in my front, and intimating that I would very soon be engaged, and that I was making my dispositions to meet the attack." While attending to battery dispositions, another courier from Meade arrived, this time carrying a "peremptory" order for Sickles to report to army headquarters at once.

46 OR, 27/2: 318, 358. Clark afterwards reported this encounter at 2:00 p.m. His time-estimate might have been off by an hour or so, but he otherwise described the movement of Hood's Division crossing the Emmitsburg Road in the vicinity of the present-day Texas State Memorial.

47 Ibid., 27/1: 585-586; Hanifen, *History of Battery B*, 68; Toombs, *New Jersey Troops*, 201. Clark's ability to fire directly to the west was obstructed by terrain and the Wentz buildings. This further supports that he was describing Hood's movements.

Sickles temporarily turned command over to Birney and rode to headquarters, “feeling assured that before I could return the engagement would open.”⁴⁸

As the corps commanders gathered at Meade’s headquarters, Warren arrived with stunning news. “There seemed to be some doubt about whether he [Sickles] should occupy a line in front,” the chief engineer later testified, “or the one on the ridge in the rear; and I am not sure but a report had come in from some of our officers that that position was not occupied. I know I had sent an officer there to ascertain and report.” Warren confirmed what had been brewing all morning: Sickles’s Third Corps was not where Meade expected them to be. In response, Meade ordered Fifth Corps commander George Sykes to immediately move his command over toward the left flank. Meade told Sykes that he would meet him there, and the commanding general was in the process of mounting a horse when Sickles arrived at headquarters.⁴⁹

Warren’s news and the sounds of increased firing terminated the meeting. Sickles had, by his own account, “hastened to headquarters with all speed, but before I got there the sound of the cannon announced that battle had opened.” Meade met his difficult subordinate and announced, “You need not dismount, General. I hear the sound of cannon on your front. Return to your command. I will join you there at once.” Sickles then turned on his horse and raced back toward his front lines, with Meade following a short distance behind.⁵⁰

As Meade rode past the left of Hancock’s Second Corps, he was “wholly unprepared to find it [Sickles’ corps] advanced far beyond any possible construction of its being on the prolongation of the line of the Second Corps. Its lines were over half a mile out to the front, to the Emmitsburg Road, entirely disconnected with the rest of the army, and beyond supporting

48 OR, 27/3: 1086; Meade, *Life and Letters*, 2: 71-72; Hyde, *The Union Generals Speak*, 44. Meade did not mention this meeting in his report or later in his Congressional testimony, and other supporters such as Warren followed suit. See OR, 27/1: 116. Also at 3:00 p.m., Meade drafted a dispatch to General-in-Chief Henry Halleck in Washington, “I have today, up to this hour, awaited the attack of the enemy, I having a strong position for defensive. I am not determined, as yet, on attacking him till his position is more developed. He has been moving on both my flanks, apparently, but it is difficult to tell exactly his movements. I have delayed attacking, to allow the Sixth Corps and parts of other corps to reach this place and to rest the men.” See OR, 27/1: 72.

49 Meade, *Life and Letters*, 2: 72-73; Hyde, *The Union Generals Speak*, 168; OR, 27/1: 592; Biddle, “General Meade at Gettysburg,” *The Annals of the War*, 211.

50 Hyde, *The Union Generals Speak*, 44; Meade, *Life and Letters*, 2: 72-73; Sickles, “Further Recollections of Gettysburg,” *North American Review*, 265-266; Tremain, *Two Days of War*, 60-61.

distance.” Warren initially accompanied Meade but as they turned toward the Peach Orchard, he directed Warren to Little Round Top instead. “I wish you would ride over and if anything serious is going on, attend to it.” Warren and several staff officers then rode rapidly toward the hill.⁵¹

Meade proceeded to the Peach Orchard, and arrived just after Sickles. The generals conducted their first meaningful conversation of the day. Needless to say, Meade was not pleased by what he saw:

I told him [Sickles] it was not the position I had expected him to take; that he had advanced his line beyond the support of my army, and that I was very fearful he would be attacked and would lose the artillery, which he had put so far in front, before I could support it, or that if I undertook to support it I would have to abandon all the rest of the line which I had adopted- that is, I would have to fight the battle out there where he was.⁵²

Meade assessed the new Third Corps line. He deemed the Emmitsburg Road ridge neutral ground. The Third Corps was beyond immediate support from the remainder of the army, and presumably any enemy troops that reached this sector would suffer from the same disadvantage. Therefore, in Meade’s estimation, neither army could occupy or otherwise use the ridge to its advantage.⁵³

Sickles “expressed regret” that he moved his corps to a position that did not meet with his commander’s approval. He promptly offered to withdraw to the Cemetery Ridge line. However, with a Confederate attack imminent, Meade feared that the enemy “would not permit him to withdraw, and that there was no time for any further change or movement.” As if Longstreet’s artillerists sought to punctuate Meade’s thoughts, before he “had finished that remark,” Rebel batteries opened fire and the battle commenced. It was too late to withdraw the Third Corps. Meade would have to support Sickles’s advanced front.⁵⁴

51 Meade, *Life and Letters*, 2: 72-73; Trudeau, *Gettysburg: A Testing of Courage*, 320; Coddingon, *The Gettysburg Campaign*, 388.

52 Hyde, *The Union Generals Speak*, 108.

53 Meade, *Life and Letters*, 2: 78-79; Biddle, “General Meade at Gettysburg,” *The Annals of the War*, 211.

54 Hyde, *The Union Generals Speak*, 108. Meade similarly wrote in his report, “I was explaining to him that he was too far in advance, and discussing with him the propriety of withdrawing, when the enemy opened on him with several batteries in his front and on his flank, and immediately brought forward columns of infantry and made a most vigorous assault.” OR, 27/1: 116.



"Second Day's Fight" Stereoview by Levi Mumper.

Author's Collection

Whether or not Sickles had any personal authority over supporting troops remained a point of debate among the participants. Meade told Sickles that he planned to move the Fifth Corps to the army's left. According to Sickles, Meade also pledged, "I could look to General Hancock for support on my right flank. I added that I should want considerable artillery; that the enemy were developing a strong force of artillery. He authorized me to send to General Hunt who commanded the reserve of the artillery, for as much artillery as I wanted." Sickles then confidently assured Meade "in my ability to hold the position; which I did."⁵⁵

Given the mutual animosity between the generals, it seems unlikely that Meade would entrust Sickles with anything more than the Third Corps infantry. This lack of clarity, however, added to the afternoon's chaos when Sickles and

55 Hyde, *The Union Generals Speak*, 45. Also see Sickles, "Further Recollections of Gettysburg," *North American Review*, 266.

his staff later attempted to commandeer elements of the Fifth Corps away from their designated points.⁵⁶

Artillery projectiles increasingly flew across the Peach Orchard as the conversation between Meade and Sickles drew to a close. The generals and their assembled staffs made inviting targets for the Confederate gunners. Apparently Meade's favorite horse, "Old Baldy," was unavailable when Meade needed to ride to the Peach Orchard, so he borrowed a mount from General Pleasonton. Rider and horse were unaccustomed to each other, and according to an amused Henry Tremain, Meade had some difficulty in keeping the beast from running. Fortunately for the Union war effort, Meade was uninjured, but his departure from the Peach Orchard marked the final time that he and Sickles met on the battlefield.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, chief engineer Warren reached Little Round only to find his worst fears confirmed. Warren discovered that only a handful of signal officers occupied the hill with no infantry or artillery nearby to provide support. Standing near the summit, Warren's view to the west revealed Longstreet's developing battle line. Warren hurriedly sent a message to Meade urging the general "that we would at once have to occupy that place very strongly." Sykes's Fifth Corps was already en route to the Union left, but Meade feared they would not arrive in time to secure his flank. He ordered Humphreys to abandon the Emmitsburg Road and move at once toward Little Round Top.⁵⁸

Humphreys received his orders and prepared his division to move at once. He also directed the courier to relay his concerns to Meade about vacating his current position along the Emmitsburg Road. Humphreys then decided to deliver the message personally to Meade. He presumed that Meade was in the Peach Orchard and rode in that direction. Before arriving, another of

56 Henry Tremain alleged in his memoirs, "just after the ball opened General Meade agreed with [Sickles] and promised him support." Unfortunately "the supports were not placed under his command and were not handled as intelligently as they would have been by one who knew the surroundings more perfectly." See Tremain, *Two Days of War*, 104.

57 Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The Second Day*, 142, 144; Tremain, *Two Days of War*, 63-65. According to Henry Tremain, one enemy "ball went high and harmlessly struck the ground. But the whizzing missile had frightened the charger of General Meade into an uncontrollable frenzy. He reared, he plunged. He could not be quieted. Nothing was possible to be done with such a beast except to let him run; and run he would, and run he did. The staff straggled after him; and so General Meade . . . was apparently ingloriously and involuntarily carried temporarily from the front."

58 Hyde, *The Union Generals Speak*, 168; Norton, *Attack and Defense of Little Round Top*, 309; Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign*, 388.

Meade's staff members intercepted Humphreys and notified him, "General Meade recalled his order [to deploy on Little Round Top] and that I should occupy the position General Sickles had directed me to take." Fifth Corps reinforcements were approaching Little Round Top and Meade no longer needed Humphreys to secure the hill.

Humphreys recalled, "In a second the division went about-face," as they returned to their prior position along the Emmitsburg Road. He boasted, "the whole thing was done with the precision of a careful exercise, the enemy's artillery giving effect to its picturesqueness." Those military men who watched the spectacle from Cemetery Ridge described it "as a beautiful sight." An aide soon arrived from Sickles instructing Humphreys to return to the Emmitsburg Road. This message presumably annoyed Humphreys and he responded that the shift was already underway. The whole incident probably consumed very little time, and overall, was of little importance. In the bigger picture, however, this was not the final time that troops marched in confusion along Sickles's front.⁵⁹

59 Meade, *Life and Letters*, 2: 82-83; Woods, "Humphreys' Division's Flank March to Little Round Top," *Gettysburg Magazine* 6, 59-60; Humphreys, *Andrew Atkinson Humphreys: A Biography*, 193-194.