

filled out with Colquitt's brigade to Hagood's right, then James G. Martin's and Thomas L. Clingman's North Carolina brigades before dawn. Wise's brigade held the far right, which joined the Dimmock Line somewhere near Battery No. 15. The Confederates still held Batteries No. 12, 13, and 14, which now were forward of the new Rebel line.²⁶

The arrival of Hoke's 5,000 men was the turning point in the campaign for Petersburg. The Yankees failed to capitalize on their chance to demolish Wise's outnumbered command on June 15. Smith used four hours to scout and prepare his command so that when he achieved an easy penetration of the bulge in the Dimmock Line, darkness was already setting in. Even then he was content to wait until dawn to exploit his success. Claiming that the Dimmock Line was "a stronger position than Missionary Ridge," Smith told Hincks to reverse the captured works and hold what he had gained.²⁷

The van of Hancock's Second Corps reached the battlefield at 9:00 P.M., relieving Hincks's division on Smith's left and extending the Federal line. Beauregard thought that Petersburg was still at Smith's mercy and prepared for the worst all night of June 15-16. He issued orders for Bushrod R. Johnson's division to abandon the Howlett Line, hastily informing Lee of his action. Johnson's men left pickets and some campfires burning and then hastened toward Petersburg. Still outnumbered, Beauregard nevertheless assembled a sizable force for the defense of the Cockade City by dawn. What might have been a Federal walkover was developing into a fierce battle.²⁸

IN THE TREASURES OF PETERSBURG
BY EARL HESS (2009)

CHAPTER THREE

Three Days in June

Even after June 15, the Federals maintained the advantage of momentum—they continued to move troops south of the Appomattox faster than the Confederates. But whether they could overcome the problems of troop exhaustion, lack of information, and the defensive potential of even modest earthworks remained to be seen.

When Lee received word in the early morning hours of June 16 that Beauregard planned to abandon the Howlett Line, he hurried George E. Pickett's division from its position near Glendale, on the old Frayser's Farm battlefield. Lee also sent Anderson to take charge of the Howlett Line and asked Beauregard to leave his pickets behind until the relieving force arrived. But it soon became apparent that the pickets were gone and some Federals had already occupied the Howlett works. Lee dispatched two other divisions to help Pickett retake them. The army commander had thus far repositioned his force so that about half his available troops were south of the James River.¹

JUNE 16

Beauregard was too busy at Petersburg to worry about the Bermuda Hundred line. Johnson's division arrived at 10:00 A.M., giving Beauregard a total of 10,000 men to defend the city. Johnson placed his troops to Wise's right, extending the Confederate position east and southeast of town. Even though the Second and Eighteenth Corps were in place and could have moved forward at any time, Meade ordered Hancock and Smith to wait until Burnside arrived before they launched another attack. The two corps already had around 30,000 men on the battlefield, outnumbering Beauregard three to one, but they were idle nearly all day. Hancock's and Smith's commands joined at the Friend House, near Battery No. 8, while Hancock's left wing extended nearly to the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad.²

By the end of the day, Beauregard decided that Hagood's line was not strong enough. He ordered David B. Harris to lay out a new position on more advantageous ground to the rear and informed Lee that he would fall back to it as soon as possible.³

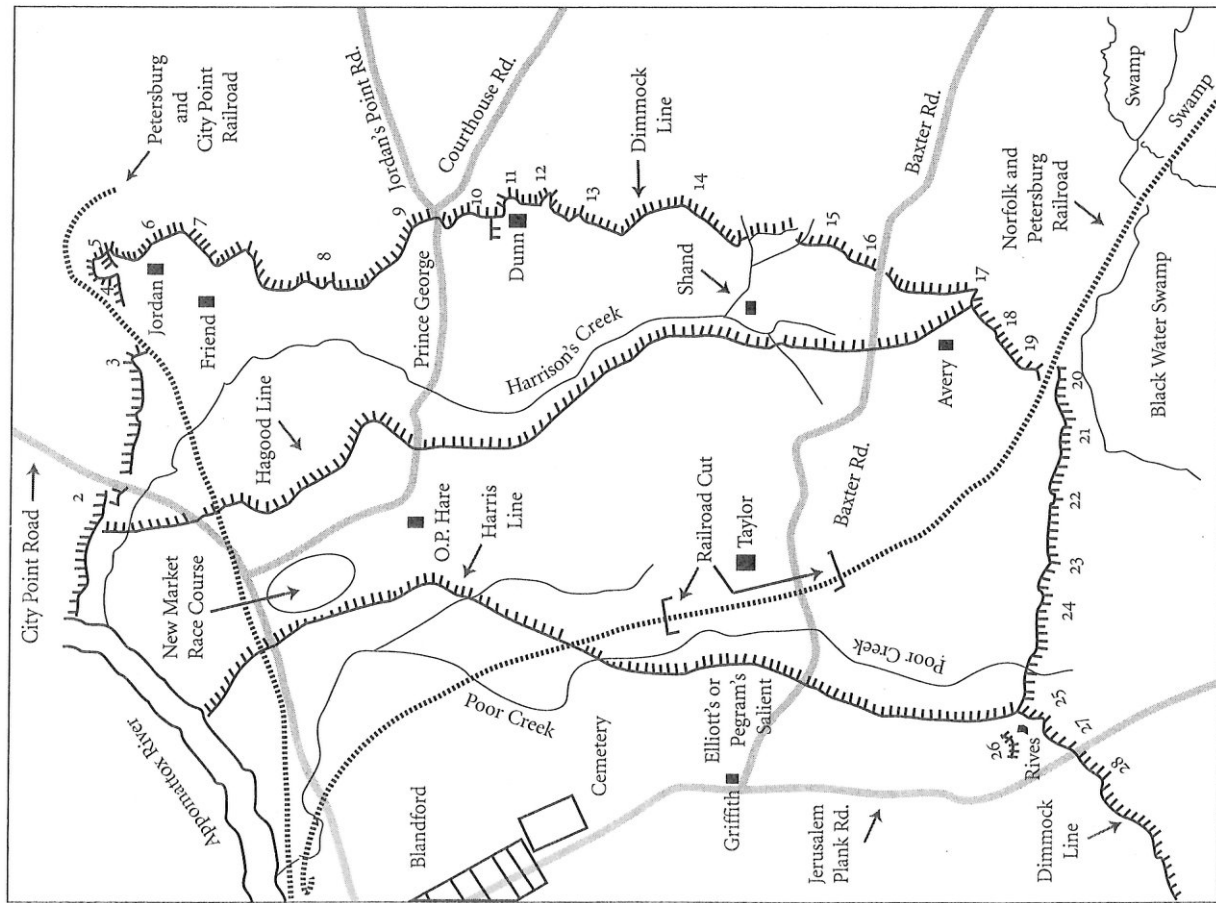
As the armies waited, a seesaw struggle for control of the Howlett Line took place at Bermuda Hundred. Butler became aware that Beauregard had given up the strong work on the morning of June 16. He advanced the Tenth Corps and a portion of the Eighteenth Corps to take possession of the works and tear up the Richmond and Petersburg Railroad. The Yankees occupied the entire line, even Battery Dantzler, the northern anchor, by early afternoon. Grant was greatly encouraged by this news and arranged for two divisions of the Sixth Corps to help Butler.⁴

Instead of pushing out to permanently sever the lines of communication between Richmond and Petersburg, or to move on Petersburg from the north, Butler's men busied themselves with minor and shortsighted tasks. Weitzel put 1,200 men to work shoveling away the Confederate parapet and cutting trees that stood between the lines, for they had served as cover for Confederate sharpshooters during the past month. Weitzel tried to make a "rapid survey" of the Rebel works and looked for suitable ground for advanced redoubts between the lines. From Butler down to the lowest private, no one seemed to think this was a unique opportunity that had to be exploited. Instead, housekeeping chores occupied everyone's attention.⁵

This gave Anderson a chance to reclaim the Howlett Line. He deployed Pickett's and Charles W. Field's divisions and pushed back Federal pickets on the Richmond and Petersburg Turnpike. These pickets warned Alfred H. Terry, temporarily commanding the Tenth Corps, that all of Lee's army was advancing, and he ordered a retreat. The Confederates reoccupied most of the Howlett Line by 6:00 P.M. Field advanced to an unfinished Confederate extension that diverged from the original Howlett Line about halfway between the two rivers. It angled off to the southwest and connected with the Appomattox about a mile upstream from the southern terminus of the original line. The Federals still held that southern half of the original works, but darkness prevented the Rebels from pushing on.⁶

Lee still could not make sense of Grant's intentions on June 16, even though he had allowed his army to straddle the James River in an effort to make up for Beauregard's need to shift troops to Petersburg. Word that the Second and Eighteenth Corps fronted Beauregard did not clarify the situation; it could mean that Grant intended to advance on both sides of the river. Lee waited a little longer while shifting the minimum force necessary to help Beauregard.⁷

Grant, on the other hand, possessed the strategic initiative. He and Meade



Petersburg, June 15-18, 1864

were already on the battlefield outside Petersburg by midday on June 16. The van of the Ninth Corps had also arrived at 10:00 A.M., and two of its divisions were in line by early afternoon. The Fifth Corps was then crossing the James River, and the Sixth Corps was preparing to cross too. But when Grant and Meade took in the situation, they decided that the Ninth Corps was too exhausted and scattered to play a significant role in the day's attack — the last division did not arrive until 6:00 P.M. The assault would have to be made by the troops already in position.⁸

Hancock commanded both corps that day, but his initiative had been stifled by Meade's order to wait. A reconnaissance in force by Col. Thomas W. Egan's brigade of Birney's division led to the capture of Battery No. 12, one of the works now located forward of the right wing of the Hagood Line. Ransom's brigade, however, prevented Egan from advancing any farther. The Federals dug in at a right angle to the Dimmock Line facing north and waited for further orders.⁹

Grant told Meade to attack, and it took the army leader two hours to plan what to do. Barnard and Comstock of Grant's staff reconnoitered the terrain but could not determine where the Rebels were strong or weak. Barnard nevertheless recommended an attack by one division on Hancock's left, which led Francis C. Barlow and Meade's chief of staff, Andrew A. Humphreys, to scout that area. Meanwhile, Meade devised an order of attack in which Barlow was to strike at the area around the Avery and Shand houses, supported by two brigades of the Ninth Corps. David B. Birney's division was to strike at the area around the Hare House, supported by John Gibbon's division. The Eighteenth Corps was to demonstrate to Hancock's right.¹⁰

Barlow went in vigorously at 6:00 P.M. and happened to approach a flaw in the Confederate position. When Johnson's division took post to Wise's right that morning, Johnson had allowed a ravine to create a gap a quarter-mile wide between the two commands. Wise told Johnson of this weakness, and the latter agreed to fill the gap with a brigade, but this had not been done before Barlow's men went in.

The Federals captured Batteries No. 13 and 14, which also were forward of the Hagood Line, and they dented the main Confederate position. Col. John S. Fulton's Tennessee brigade of Johnson's division fell back a short distance under the pressure. This exposed Wise's flank, and he dispatched troops to help Fulton stabilize the line. As a result, even though Burnside sent in a brigade to support Barlow's left, the Federals achieved no breakthrough on Beauregard's right wing.¹¹

Birney had little more luck than Barlow. His division struck out from the captured portion of the Dimmock Line near the Dunn House and mostly hit

Clingman's brigade of Hoke's division. Birney's troops made a temporary and limited lodgment in the Rebel trench, but they could not exploit it before the Confederates pushed them back. Gibbon tried to support Birney to the north. Here, Martin's brigade of Hoke's division was positioned east of the Hare House, fronted by a wide open field. As soon as Col. John Ramsey's brigade of Gibbon's division emerged from the tree cover on the opposite side of the field, the Confederates subjected it to a storm of artillery and small arms fire. Some of Ramsey's men got within thirty yards of the Confederate parapet, but most fell back to the edge of the woods and dug in. To Hancock's right, Smith's Eighth Corps pushed to within seventy-five yards of Hagood's brigade before they gave up and retired.¹²

By 9:00 P.M., after three hours of sporadic fighting, the Union advance came to a halt. Meade failed to utilize his three-to-one numerical superiority over Beauregard and started too late in the day to allow the Federals an opportunity to exploit success. All in all, June 16 was yet another day of deliverance for the Confederates.¹³

Warren's Fifth Corps began arriving on the battlefield late that evening, but the Confederates did not remain idle in the dark. Their skirmishers opened fire on the Yankees who were digging in close to the Hagood Line. This lasted until 4:00 in the morning of June 17 and destroyed the sleep of everyone involved; it also failed to prevent the Federals from fortifying deeply enough to afford some shelter by dawn.¹⁴

JUNE 17

Unlike the previous two days, fighting began at daybreak on June 17 with an attack by the Ninth Corps. Robert B. Potter's division, on the far left, faced a Confederate position that had significant weaknesses. A network of ravines, forming the headwaters of Harrison's Creek, separated Potter from the Rebels, with the Shand House on high ground in the middle of this network and in front of the Confederate line. There was a shallow salient there as the extreme right of the Hagood Line extended forward, toward the Federals, in order to connect with Battery No. 15 southeast of the Shand House. The Rebel guns in the battery were able to partially fire down the length of the main ravine that Potter had to cross. The Confederate infantry, however, was stretched very thin. Clingman's North Carolina brigade had been inserted between Wise's command and Fulton's Tennesseans, but a gap of 100 yards still existed between Fulton's right and the battery. There still was a gap of some distance between Fulton and Clingman.

Potter carefully planned his attack, placing his two brigades in the main ravine at about 3:00 A.M. They moved out before Confederate gunners could

catch sight of them in the daylight. The Federals pushed back Fulton's skirmish line, located on the western edge of the ravine system, and smashed into the main line. Fulton's troubled brigade, which had formerly been commanded by Johnson himself, folded in the early dawn. Potter captured 600 men along with the flag of the 44th Tennessee, and the 48th Pennsylvania took Battery No. 15 with two Rebel guns.

Unfortunately, no one came up to help Potter exploit his success. James H. Ledlie's division started out but was slowed by the ravines and brush and could not bring any weight to bear. Barlow's division of the Second Corps also failed to support Potter's right. As a result, Stephen Elliott's South Carolina brigade of Johnson's division was able to establish a new line several hundred yards west of Potter's breakthrough, and the Ninth Corps troops busied themselves with consolidating their position. Meade's artillery chief, Henry J. Hunt, placed two batteries near Battery No. 15 and ordered that the open gorge of the captured work be closed with a new parapet after dark.¹⁵

Another Ninth Corps effort was postponed until 2:00 P.M., when Orlando B. Willcox's division sallied forth against the Hagood Line north of the Shand House. Willcox formed his two brigades partly in the ravine and partly on its western crest, but the advance was marred by confusion. The guide unit, the 2nd Michigan, got its directions mixed up and veered sharply to the right, causing the whole of John F. Hartranft's brigade to follow. The Confederates poured enfilade fire into its exposed left flank, completely breaking the momentum of the assault. The situation was made worse for Willcox by the absence of artillery support and by the dust kicked up by his men as they struggled across a cornfield that fronted the Rebel line, which here was held primarily by Wise's brigade.

Burnside's engineer officer, James St. Clair Morton, was killed by the explosion of a shell in this attack. His loss affected many in Burnside's corps. Willcox suffered 840 casualties out of only 1,890 men engaged in his division and accomplished nothing for the loss. The survivors dug in wherever they could for the rest of what one Federal called "a hard fighting day." Nelson A. Miles's brigade of Barlow's division advanced to the north of Willcox as support, but it made no headway.¹⁶

By the time Willcox's men accepted their repulse, Lee finally became convinced that Grant was making his main effort south of the Appomattox. Beauregard relayed further information about the units confronting him, which prompted Lee to order Hill's Third Corps to Drewry's Bluff so he could push it south if further developments warranted. Beauregard also informed Lee that he intended to fall back to his new line that night. If worst came to worst, the Creole general intended to evacuate Petersburg, cross the Appomattox, and

secure his men behind Swift Creek. This ominous warning reached Lee at 10:00 P.M. Twenty minutes later, word arrived from his cavalry that the Army of the Potomac had definitely crossed the James. At 11:00 P.M., Lee finally ordered Hill to cross the Appomattox.¹⁷

Long before that order reached Hill, more fighting took place on both sides of the Appomattox. Lee spent some time that afternoon at Bermuda Hundred, helping Anderson manage the recapture of the Howlett Line. The question was whether the Confederates should risk an attack to secure the southern segment of the original line, still held by Butler's men. At first Lee authorized an advance to begin at 5:00 P.M., but at the last minute he sent Anderson and some engineer officers to see if the new line, which angled southwest from the center of the Howlett works, would do just as well as the old one. The group quickly surveyed the trench and decided not to risk any more lives in an attack. Field was riding with Anderson and quickly sent word to his division to cancel the assault, but Pickett was with his command and never got the word. The Virginia division advanced as planned. When he learned of this, Field threw in a brigade of his own as support. The Army of the James offered scant resistance, and the Rebels reclaimed all of the original Howlett Line.¹⁸

About the time that Pickett and Field completed their restoration of the Howlett Line, Ledlie's division launched a spirited attack against Petersburg. Moved up to command the division a short time before, Ledlie took shelter in a ravine as his division moved forward under Col. Jacob P. Gould at 6:00 P.M. It started from the same ravine north of the Shand House that Willcox had used as his jump-off point earlier in the day. Rather than veer northwest, Gould angled the division toward the southwest as soon as it started.

Three Confederate brigades got mixed up in the coming fight: the right wing of Clingman, much of Wise, and part of Elliott. John Forrest-Robinson of the 23rd South Carolina was not happy with the works Elliott defended. They were "of slight protection, only about waist deep and no ditch in front." Suddenly Forrest-Robinson heard the Federals shout "Forward" in the ravine. Then he saw first their regimental flags appear over the crest and then their gun barrels and their heads. The Confederates waited until the whole man appeared, then opened fire. Gould's command advanced with vigor and broke into the Confederate works, driving three Rebel regiments from the field and forcing the two on both sides of the breach to refuse their lines. A quarter-mile segment of the Hagood Line fell into Federal hands; but Gould had no reserves to widen the breach, and counterthrusts by the Confederates kept his troops off balance. Yet it was not until 11:00 P.M. that Ransom's and Gracie's brigades mounted a strong counterattack that finally sealed the breach.¹⁹

Warren's Fifth Corps began to reach the field by midmorning of June 17 and

deployed to the left of the Ninth Corps, stretching the Union line a bit beyond Beauregard's flank. Meade feared a Rebel attack might slice into his unprotected left, so he deployed Warren in a defensive posture. Lysander Cutler took position south of Baxter Road, but Samuel W. Crawford and Romeyn B. Ayres deployed to Burnside's rear. Charles Griffin remained in reserve close by. For the rest of the day Warren scouted and became familiar with the terrain but made no effort to bypass the Confederate flank. On the far Union right, a similar sort of inactivity prevailed on June 17 as Smith's Eighteenth Corps remained quiet all day.²⁰

Meanwhile, David B. Harris and Hilary P. Jones, Beauregard's artillery chief, laid out a new line to the rear of the Hagood position that would become known as the Harris Line. The two officers worked all day of June 17 to drive stakes from the Appomattox River to Baxter Road. Then they showed the line to various staff officers of Hoke's and Johnson's divisions before dark so they could pass on detailed information about where each regiment should be posted. Brigade commanders received orders to fall back to this new position at night.²¹

Darkness settled on the battlefield as the Confederates began to light campfires and post pickets. Then they quietly evacuated the Hagood Line at 12:30 A.M. Units took up their assigned positions on Harris's line and started to entrench. In some areas, a little digging had already been done. Members of the 34th Virginia found a group of black laborers fortifying near Baxter Road. They pitched in with cups and bayonets to speed the work. Nearby, the 49th North Carolina discovered a trench that already was two feet deep and began to improve it. Troops along the line complained there were not enough entrenching tools, and they were forced to use anything handy, "in fact, every utensil that could be found." As a result, some units, such as Ransom's 56th North Carolina, constructed only meager works before dawn.²²

Hagood also found the crude beginnings of a trench when he pulled his brigade back to the Harris Line, which was some 800 yards behind his former position. At some spots, the trench was two feet deep. At others, "not a spade had been put in the ground—the line had been merely marked out by the engineers." His South Carolinians settled in by 1:30 A.M., with the left resting on the Appomattox and the brigade stretched to the breaking point across the City Point Railroad all the way to Hare House Hill. New Market Race Course, a large oval of cleared land, lay in front of his right wing. Hagood's men started trenches where none existed and improved trenches already begun.²³

Capt. Richard G. Pegram's Virginia battery pulled out of the Howlett Line on June 16 and took position on the Harris Line opposite the Taylor House

before nightfall on June 17. Pegram failed to notice the stakes that Harris had planted, which marked the exact position for the guns. Instead, the captain put his pieces a few yards forward and began to dig detached, one-gun emplacements with semicircular parapets. Harris was surprised when he rode up at 11:00 P.M., and he told Pegram of his mistake. The stakes behind his guns indicated what Pegram later called a heavily fortified battery position, "with traverses of such thickness as would require a large force to complete it in a day." Harris, however, warned him not to expect any infantrymen to construct the work, as they had their hands full on the rest of the line. Pegram knew his men were too tired to dig the emplacement that Harris contemplated. "I was compelled to hold on to the position I had already taken," he later recalled. As the infantry fell back to either side of him, they were also compelled to align with his forward position. A shallow bulge in the line, later called Pegram's or Elliott's Salient, was thus created. Pegram's men constructed only "slight earthworks" by dawn. When Union artillery opened at 10:00 A.M. of June 18, several projectiles plowed through the thin parapets.²⁴

Despite this weak sector, the Harris Line was stronger than the Hagood Line. It stretched from the Appomattox River to Battery No. 25 just east of Jerusalem Plank Road and was located 500 to 1,000 yards behind Hagood's position and about a mile behind the left wing of the Dimmock Line. Although it had some shallow angles, Harris's line took advantage of high ground between ravines and creeks. There were several open fields in front of the position, most notably at the New Market Race Course, around Hare House Hill, and between Taylor's Farm and Pegram's Salient. Harris's position eliminated the huge bulge created by the placement of the Dimmock Line from Battery No. 1 to 24.²⁵

JUNE 18

In the early morning hours of June 18, an officer from Beauregard's headquarters brought information that finally convinced Lee that Grant was completely across the James River. He had hesitated for days before committing his own army to that area. Now Lee sent orders for Kershaw, Field, and Hill to march for Petersburg. Only Pickett and half of Wilcox's divisions continued to hold the Howlett Line, and no appreciable number of Confederate troops remained north of the James.²⁶

But it took many hours for these units to reach the battlefield. Meanwhile, the Federals enjoyed a four-to-one numerical advantage over Beauregard. Fourteen Union divisions were on the field, totaling 80,000 men. The Army of the Potomac advanced at 4:30 A.M. to find the Hagood Line empty. Judging from reports, Meade believed the new Confederate position was not well for-

tified, so he ordered a general attack. Smith planned to make the main effort of the Eighteenth Corps with John H. Martindale's division, and Thomas H. Neill's division of the Sixth Corps in support. Gibbon's and Birney's divisions, the latter commanded by Gershom Mott because Birney had to take charge of the Second Corps from the ailing Hancock, would attack in the center. Mott faced the Hare House Hill sector and a salient held by Alfred H. Colquitt's Georgians. Burnside crunched his command into a narrow one-division front, with Willcox leading the way and Potter and Ledlie behind as support. Warren rearranged his corps as well, with Crawford's division extending the Union line left of Burnside, then Cutler's division to his left, as he held Ayres's and Griffin's divisions in reserve.²⁷

The Second Corps was the first to come to grips with the new Rebel position. McAllister's brigade of Mott's division advanced at 11:00 A.M., crossing a sunken portion of the Prince George Court House Road. His troops managed to get only 100 yards beyond the road before withering fire brought them to a halt. "Our ranks melted away," McAllister frankly admitted to his family, "and we could not advance further." His brigade remained here until midafternoon, when it fell back and reformed. Before that withdrawal, and after McAllister's advance, Gibbon went forward to his right at about noon. Two of his brigades, led by Byron R. Pierce and John Ramsey, were torn apart by the same kind of devastating fire that had stopped Mott. Gibbon was only feebly supported by the tentative advance of Martindale's division to the north.

When Pierce and Ramsey stopped and fell back, Gibbon sent Thomas A. Smyth's brigade in to Pierce's right. George D. Bowen noted that the sunken section of the Prince George Court House Road made a superb defensive feature, as it was four feet deep and bordered by a fence three or four boards high. But between it and the Rebel line was an open cornfield, the tender stalks only a foot tall. He could see the Confederate works on the other side, 400 to 500 yards away. They "appeared to be very strong," crammed with guns and men. Smyth advanced but made little headway.²⁸

Some of the hardest fighting occurred farther to the Union left on the Ninth Corps sector of the line. Willcox advanced across an oat field and drove Confederate skirmishers from Taylor's Farm about noon. As his men approached the deep cut of the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad, they found telegraph wire stretched between stumps and partially hidden by grass. It caused momentary confusion and milling about. Eventually, Willcox's men spilled into the cut, where they found some degree of safety. Crawford's division and part of Griffin's division, to Willcox's left, also advanced about this time. Many of Warren's troops got into the cut where the Federal advance stalled.



McKnight's 12th New York Battery at Confederate Battery No. 8, Dimmock Line.
(Massachusetts Commandery, Military Order of the Loyal Legion and the
U.S. Army Military History Institute)

The cut was both a shelter and an obstacle for the Unionists. Its sides were up to thirty-five feet tall and nearly vertical on the Confederate side, forcing the Yankees to cut steps to reach the top. Willcox had pushed the Rebel skirmishers to the valley of Poor Creek, but the main Confederate line, anchored by Pegram's battery, lay just west of the stream. The Harris Line crossed both Poor Creek and the railroad grade to the north of the cut, allowing Confederate troops and artillery to hit Willcox's right flank with enfilade fire. Some of Hartranft's men ripped up ties and rails and threw together an improvised breastwork.²⁹

Matt W. Ransom's Tar Heels were positioned just south of Elliott's brigade and within sight of the railroad cut. W. A. Day of the 49th North Carolina managed to raise the small parapet he found on Harris's line a foot before the Federal attack started. As soon as it stalled in the cut, Day's comrades grabbed whatever improvised tools they could find and furiously dug some more. "Then we made the dirt fly," he remembered after the war; "we worked in a hurry."

Ransom's units deployed in a single rank and suffered from the usual shortage of entrenching tools, but they managed to construct a parapet at least shoulder high by evening.³⁰

By midday on June 18, Federal commanders on all segments of the battlefield had more detailed information about the terrain fronting the new Rebel line, and many had a vivid demonstration of its strength. Yet Meade began to send desperate messages urging his corps commanders to push on with no further delay.³¹

This led to another round of attacks by 2:00 P.M., when Martindale advanced George J. Stannard's and Griffin A. Stedman's brigades between the Appomattox River and City Point Road. The attack was stopped by only three regiments of Hagood's brigade before the Yankees got closer than 300 yards from the parapet. Stannard's and Stedman's men dug in where they halted, which was only about fifty yards from their starting point. Some of them incorporated the bodies of their dead comrades into the parapet, piling dirt over them. South of City Point Road, Neill sent out Frank Wheaton's brigade from his Sixth Corps division. It did not push the attack vigorously, and Hagood's two remaining regiments had no difficulty convincing Wheaton's men to halt. All efforts to make headway north of the Hare property ended by 3:30 P.M.³²

By the time things settled on the Sixth and Eighteenth Corps front, elements of Lee's army had reached the battlefield. Kershaw and Field were now in place to the right of Beauregard's beleaguered command, extending the Confederate line beyond Jerusalem Plank Road. Warren's Fifth Corps, which had not yet been engaged at Petersburg, mounted an extensive effort to push through. Warren was responsible for the left of the army, stretching west from the railroad cut. Much of his line took shelter along the rail bed before going in. Warren held Ayres's division in reserve on his far left as he advanced the rest of his line. The men soon discovered that Poor Creek Valley lay in the way, while the extreme right of Elliott's brigade, all of Ransom's brigade, and all of Kershaw's division lay beyond.

The Confederates swept the open, broken landscape between the lines with fire. Crawford never got close to the Rebel position, but elements of Griffin's division made greater progress. Joshua L. Chamberlain's brigade of Pennsylvania troops rolled into Poor Creek Valley, although Chamberlain was severely wounded on the way, and managed to claw its way up the opposite slope to within a few yards of the enemy parapet before stopping. Cutler failed to close with the Rebel line, while Ayres never conducted an attack at all. He ordered his men to advance into the open as a diversion but then halted them partway. Ayres's men dug in for shelter. "We gradually sunk ourselves in the sandy soil by a regular *hen scratching* with our hands & got so low as to feel middling safe,"

reported Charles Bowen of the 12th U.S. Infantry. Heavy artillery fire tore into Ayres's division, taking out 160 men in J. Howard Kitching's heavy artillery brigade. The men dug with spoons, sticks, hands, and bayonets until spades arrived at dusk; then they constructed a regular parapet nine feet thick and four feet tall. "We can laugh at our shot & shell now," crowed Bowen.³³

Artillery officer Charles Wainwright did not think his corps pressed its attack. "I cannot say that our men went in well, or at all as if they meant to carry the works. In five minutes they were coming back." Wainwright tried to rally several hundred men of Cutler's division who had fallen back to his guns, taking shelter behind a shallow ridge. Even though he offered to lead them personally, only two dozen or so responded.³⁴

On the other side of this contested field, the Confederates had little difficulty holding the Harris Line. In fact, Rebel accounts of this day say very little about the fighting. Pvt. John Alvis Parker of the 56th North Carolina, however, won distinction by saving his comrades from a Yankee shell that landed in his trench. He quickly scooped it up with a shovel and yelled, "Get out of here," while throwing it away. The projectile exploded just after clearing the parapet, but it injured no one.³⁵

On the Ninth Corps front, Willcox's division and one brigade of Potter's division went forward at about the same time as Crawford's division to the left. Members of Hartranft's brigade dug holes in the side of the railroad cut with their bayonets to climb out. They received a terrible hail of small arms and artillery fire as soon as they became visible above the lip of the cut, but they managed to drive the Confederate skirmishers across Poor Creek Valley. Many kept going up the western side of the valley, but they had little momentum left. About 1,000 men, all that were left of Hartranft's brigade, dug in 125 yards short of Pegram's battery. The attack on the Confederate right ended with a portion of Burnside's corps closer to the Rebels than any other Union force.³⁶

Even before Willcox's men drove to their limit near Taylor's House, the Second Corps had resumed its advance. It would be more appropriate to say it attempted to resume the attack, for several units of Hancock's command refused to obey orders to go in. This was the most visible instance of a refusal to fight among Union soldiers in the Civil War, and it demonstrated that some troops in the Army of the Potomac neared the end of their endurance.

In response to Meade's repeated order to assault without reference to the movements of troops to either side, Gibbon ordered Smyth's brigade to attack at about 3:00 P.M. Company commander George D. Bowen recorded how the men responded. "The officers jumped up, waved their swords and gave the order to charge. The men did not stir. The more I saw they were going to refuse to go the more urgent I became. I was so afraid they would go [I] did not know

what to do. The men knew what they could or could not do; they had decided that they could not take this line. They had had experience. The whole Brigade acted the same way; not a man started."

Commanders accepted this behavior, as Bowen's own actions demonstrated. The troops of John Fraser's brigade of Gibbon's division received orders to attack. "They looked the ground over, and they refused to attempt it," Bowen recorded. Then Byron R. Pierce's brigade of the same division received the order. "They, officers and men, positively refused." This unprecedented chain of events was followed by a try with the Third Brigade of Mott's division. It had formerly been commanded by Mott and then by Robert McAllister; now it was led by Col. Daniel Chaplin of the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery. The brigade consisted mostly of veteran units; the Maine regiment, previously inexperienced in battle, had but recently joined it.³⁷

Before Chaplin advanced, McAllister told Mott, "It is a death trap. . . . A brigade can't live in there for five minutes." Before Mott could reply, an aide rode up and confirmed the order to attack. Mott felt compelled to obey. He issued the final word, and Chaplin's command started on an epic charge.³⁸

The charge was epic not because of what it accomplished but because of the horrible losses Chaplin's men suffered. Yet, one need only mention the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery in this regard, for the rest of the brigade refused to go in with their green comrades. When Chaplin started at about 4:30 p.m., only his old regiment responded. It was led by Maj. Russell B. Shepherd and formed in three lines in the sunken portion of Prince George Court House Road. Advancing between the New Market Race Course and the Hare House, the Maine Heavies struck for the right wing of Colquitt's Georgia brigade, with the 41st Alabama of Gracie's brigade in support.

George D. Bowen watched as the Maine soldiers tore down some fencing along the sunken roadbed. Then they "climbed out of the road, dressed their lines," and stepped off. A torrent of fire immediately fell on them, but the brave artillerymen marched steadily across the open, ascending cornfield. "The nearer they approached . . . the thinner their line became," Bowen reported. He estimated the surviving members of the regiment made it about two-thirds of the way across the field before the momentum of the advance was broken. In all, the attack lasted about ten minutes. Of 900 men engaged, the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery lost 632, the highest loss of a single regiment in either army during the war. In contrast, the 41st Alabama reported the loss of only 1 man killed and 24 wounded on June 18.

Shepherd's regiment went in essentially unsupported. Mott had been able to prod Henry J. Madill's brigade forward a short distance to Shepherd's left, but it stopped too soon to be of any assistance. The rest of Chaplin's brigade took

cover in the sunken road while his former regiment was slaughtered. "It was a sickening sight to see men cut down as they were," admitted Bowen, "we looking on knowing it was but a chance that we were not out there ourselves."³⁹

This was one of the most dismal days of fighting by the Army of the Potomac during the war, characterized by equal parts of bravery, foolishness, and understandable reluctance to obey orders. Under pressure from Grant, Meade sent his army into piecemeal assaults without developing an overall plan, probing for weak points, organizing supporting units, or looking for ways to bypass Beauregard's position altogether and cross the undefended sector of the Dimmock Line. "I had positive information the enemy had not occupied [the Harris Line] more than twelve hours, and that no digging had been done on the lines prior to their occupation," Meade explained. Yet he believed the failure of the attacks was due mostly to "the moral condition of the army; for I am satisfied, had these assaults been made on the 5th and 6th of May, we should have succeeded with half the loss we met."⁴⁰

Grant supported his subordinate fully. "I am perfectly satisfied that all has been done that could be done and that the assaults today were called for by all the appearances and information that could be obtained. Now we will rest the men and use the shade for their protection u[n]til a new vein can be [s]truck."⁴¹

Wainwright pinpointed one problem. "The attack this afternoon was a fiasco of the worse kind," he wrote of the fighting. "I trust it will be the last attempt at this most absurd way of attacking entrenchments by a general advance in line. It has been tried so often now and with such fearful losses that even the stupidest private now knows that it cannot succeed, and the natural consequence follows: the men will not try it. The very sight of a bank of fresh earth now brings them to a dead halt."⁴²

The Federals were not only exhausted in body, but many were demoralized. The problem was worse in some units than in others. The Second Corps suffered the most from this malaise. Four of its brigades refused orders to attack that afternoon. Frank Wilkeson, a New York gunner, spoke with members of William R. Brewster's brigade of Mott's division late on the afternoon of June 18. "Going in to the charge, men?" he asked of them. About ten infantrymen replied, "No, we are not going to charge. We are going to run towards the Confederate earthworks, and then we are going to run back. We have had enough of assaulting earthworks. We are hungry and tired, and we want to rest and to eat." Wilkeson heard similar comments from other troops when he went to the rear later that evening for more ammunition.⁴³

With the ending of the day, both sides settled in for what became a tour of duty along these lines lasting until April 2, 1865. The accumulation of Second

Corps units at the sunken section of Prince George Court House Road broke up that evening. Only Smyth's brigade stayed behind to hold the road. He sent out a skirmish line and kept half his men awake all night. The bright moonlight helped in the recovery of wounded Federals between the lines, except those close to the Rebels. Farther to the west, Richard G. Pegram finally got some infantrymen to help him with his earthworks. Bushrod Johnson sent a detail of men with spades to improve his parapet that night, under constant sniping from Willcox's men 125 yards away.⁴⁴

The rest of Lee's army trickled into Petersburg throughout the day. Kershaw and Field had been the first to arrive that morning to guard Beauregard's flank, unengaged all day. Hill's Third Corps arrived about 6:00 p.m. and also was not engaged. Beauregard had 20,000 men available on June 18, but the troops of his own department saved Petersburg in the fighting.⁴⁵

Lee reached Petersburg with his headquarters staff by 11:30 a.m. on June 18, but he allowed Beauregard to conduct the defense of the city. The two cooperated well enough in the essentials, but Lee would not allow Beauregard to set overall strategy. The Creole general tried to persuade Lee to adopt the offensive by attacking on the afternoon of June 19 before the Yankees could dig in. Lee firmly declined, citing the need to rest his men and to continue the defensive policy he had adopted since Spotsylvania. Beauregard argued that the Federals had to be just as tired and, moreover, did not know the local area, but Lee would not budge.

The two agreed on one matter: the Harris Line was a secure defensive position. Beauregard took Lee to the top of Reservoir Hill at about 1:30 on the afternoon of June 19 to show him the topography around Petersburg. He defended Harris's decision to place most of the line down from the highest crest, especially at Pegram's Salient, by noting that it offered the Confederates a better opportunity to lay down fire on the opposite slope occupied by the enemy. This might lessen the chances that the Yankees could start siege approaches. The Harris Line became the left wing of Lee's position at Petersburg for the next nine and a half months. The Confederates positioned guns on the higher crest to the rear, but they never built a second line of works behind the Harris Line except at a few isolated locations.⁴⁶

The Harris Line was a stronger position than either the Hagood Line or the left wing of the Dimmock Line. The easy rupture of the latter on the evening of June 15 came to haunt Charles H. Dimmock after the war. Local talk spread the idea that Smith's victory had been the result of a flaw in the design of the earthworks, and to a considerable degree that was true. The batteries were open at the rear, and Dimmock had allowed an uncovered ravine to lie close to the line. Harris had more time to lay out his line than had Hagood, and of course

more troops were available to defend it on June 18 than to hold Hagood's line during the previous two days.⁴⁷

AN END AND A BEGINNING

The Federals lost heavily, about 10,600 men, in the fighting of June 15–18. Their losses included sixteen regimental commanders and fourteen brigade leaders. Estimates of Confederate losses range from 2,970 to 4,700 men. Given the size of the contending forces, the Confederates lost a much higher proportion of their available manpower than did the Yankees.⁴⁸

Despite the brilliant crossing of the James River, the Federals could not capitalize on their advantages. The Confederates were able to construct new works hastily to contain the initial rupture of the Dimmock Line on the night of June 15. As the enemy erected more fortifications and ably manned them, the willingness of some Federals and the opportunity of their comrades to take them declined. John Gibbon recalled after the war that "it became a recognized fact amongst the men themselves that when the enemy had occupied a position six or eight hours ahead of us, it was useless to attempt to take it. This feeling became so marked that when troops under these circumstances were ordered forward, they went a certain distance and then lay down and opened fire. It became a saying in the army that when the old troops got as far forward as they thought they ought to go 'they sat down and made coffee!'" Theodore Lyman, Meade's staff member, thought the results of the June 18 attacks reinforced this tendency. "Put a man in a hole and a good battery on a hill behind him, and he will beat off three times his number, even if he is not a very good soldier." Meade felt bad about the results of the fighting on June 18. "I should have taken Petersburg," he admitted to Lyman in late August, as the stalemate outside the city seemed to lengthen. "I had reason to calculate on success. The enemy had no defenses but what they had thrown up in a few hours."⁴⁹

The men of both armies settled in for a long stay in trenches that soon grew in depth, length, and complexity around Petersburg. Enoch Alexander McNair, a soldier in the 49th North Carolina, had often been under fire during the several days of battle that inaugurated the Petersburg campaign. He received two letters, one of which was from his father. "I lay in the works and read them by moon shine while the shell was falling and bursting all round us," he told his family. Like the doughty Tar Heel, thousands of blue and gray soldiers learned to live as well as fight in their trenches, which became their homes for months to come.⁵⁰