

## Chapter 10

# Flood Tide: Day Two at the XI Corps Hospital

“At the doorway I saw a huge stack of amputated arms and legs, a stack as high as my head!  
The most horrible thing I ever saw in my life! I wish I had never seen it! I sickened.”

— *Pvt. William Southerton of the 75th Ohio*

*Medical*

staffers of the XI Corps were still busy caring for the hundreds of men who were wounded on July 1 when more poured in early the next day. The steady skirmishing and sharpshooting that would consume that entire Thursday, the second day of the battle, guaranteed a steady flow of mangled and suffering men onto the Spangler farm.

The regiments on and below Cemetery Hill took a beating from Confederate sharpshooters hidden in and about town. New Yorkers, Pennsylvanians, and Ohioans alike did their best to keep their heads down and bodies shielded behind any cover they could find near the intersection of the Taneytown and Emmitsburg roads, where the 134th, 136th, and 154th New York, 55th and 73rd Ohio, and 27th Pennsylvania found themselves when dawn broke. Some of the regiments would be involved in fighting that evening a few hundred yards farther west (in what is now the Colt Park subdivision), a sharp and often overlooked affair that sent more wounded soldiers long after dark to the XI Corps hospital. The balance of the XI Corps was positioned farther up the hill or facing north and northeast on and under East Cemetery Hill.

About 4:00 p.m. on July 2, Confederate gunners on Benner's Hill east of Gettysburg and elsewhere opened fire on Cemetery Hill. Batteries from the Army

of the Potomac's Artillery Reserve, I Corps, and XI Corps fired back in a bitter duel that lasted some two hours. XI Corps Artillery Brigade components included the First New York Light Battery I, New York Light 13th Battery, First Ohio Light Battery I, First Ohio Light Battery K, and 4th United States Battery G.

"The ground was strewn with broken carriages, dead horses and dead and dying men," recalled Sgt. Samuel Cooper of the First New Hampshire Light Artillery. "And to crown it all, and make the picture still more hideous, every few minutes a shell from the enemy would come tearing through the ground and knocking down the headstones would scatter the broken stone, the sand, earth and bones of the deceased among the living adding stench horror and sacrilege to the rest of the awful scene."<sup>1</sup>

Private John Edmonds of the First Ohio Light Artillery Battery H of the Artillery Reserve was one of the men hit in the iron barrage when a shell almost took off his left foot not far from the rostrum in the present-day Soldiers' National Cemetery. Someone applied a makeshift tourniquet and placed Edmonds on a stretcher. "Boys," he announced despite the intense pain he was suffering, "that was a pretty tough pull on me, wasn't it?"<sup>2</sup>

Edmonds was a 23-year-old teacher from near Toledo, Ohio, when he enlisted in October 1861. He sported brown hair and gray eyes, stood five feet eight inches, and had not yet married, and now he was in a fight for his life. He was carried on the stretcher to the Evergreen Cemetery gate house on the Baltimore Pike, placed in an ambulance, and transported to the XI Corps hospital on the Spangler farm. On July 4, Lt. William A. Ewing of Battery H reported in a letter to his mother that Edmonds was "doing well" after his dangling foot was amputated. His condition declined, however, and he was forced to undergo another amputation. After almost two weeks of suffering, Edmonds died on July 15. The attendants placed his corpse in a wooden casket made at the XI Corps hospital and buried the Ohioan in the makeshift cemetery in the orchard next to the Spanglers' house.<sup>3</sup>

Private Justus M. Silliman of the 17th Connecticut was a patient behind Confederate lines in town when Edmonds was wounded on July 2. The lightly wounded Silliman served as a hospital attendant at the Spangler farm after the battle and got to know Edmonds. "One poor fellow who occupied this tent has left

1 Duane E. Shaffer, *Men of Granite: New Hampshire's Soldiers in the Civil War* (Columbia, SC, 2008), 152.

2 "Letter From Huntington's Battery," *Toledo (OH) Blade*, July 18, 1863.

3 William A. Ewing, "News From Battery H," *Toledo Blade*, July 11, 1863.

this world of suffering and gone to Jesus in whom he trusted,” Silliman wrote his mother in a letter on the day Edmonds died. “He was a fine intelligent man, was superintendent of the sabbath school in the town at which he had enlisted, his name is John Edmonds. . . . He leaves a mother and sisters. . . . He had his leg amputated twice.” Edmonds’ body was exhumed and reburied in Soldiers’ National Cemetery in Gettysburg. His grave is marked “John Edmonds.” He is buried mere steps from where he received his mortal wound.<sup>4</sup>

The July 2 artillery battle over control of Cemetery Hill ended at about 6:00 p.m. The long-arm battle was winding down, but more death and destruction was about to fall upon Cemetery and East Cemetery hills, and the XI Corps would be in the middle of it once more.

Lined up at the base of East Cemetery Hill, from south to north, were regiments from every brigade in the first two divisions of the XI Corps: 33rd Massachusetts, 41st New York, 153rd Pennsylvania, 68th New York, 54th New York, 17th Connecticut, and 75th Ohio, with the 25th Ohio and 107th Ohio bending into an L-shape to face the town itself. About 8:45 p.m., with darkness engulfing the battlefield, three North Carolina regiments from Brig. Gen. Robert Hoke’s brigade (under Col. Isaac Avery) and five more Louisiana regiments under Brig. Gen. Harry T. Hays, about 2,500 men, moved out of the gloom and quickly up the slope.

In the face of punishing Union canister fire, the Confederates pushed the 153rd Pennsylvania, 68th New York, and 54th New York up the slope and penetrated a breach that opened in the line. At the top, they hopped over earthen lunettes thrown up in front of the cannons and engaged in desperate hand-to-hand combat with artillerymen from Pennsylvania Batteries C and F of the Artillery Reserve and First New York Battery I of the XI Corps.

“Such hand-to-hand fighting,” marveled Pvt. William Southerton of the 75th Ohio. “Johnnies, pushing, crowding, gained our first epaulements in spite of our efforts to block the way.” By this time “It was almost impossible to distinguish who were Union, who were Confederate; to shoot and not kill our own men. Artillerists fought with ramrods, wielding them like ballbats.”<sup>5</sup>

4 Silliman to his mother, July 15, 1863, *A New Canaan Private in the Civil War*, 45. Edmonds’ real last name was “Edwards.” Someone had spelled it “Edmonds” on the muster roll when he enlisted.

5 “Reminiscences of William B. Southerton” as told to Marie W. Higgins, in William B. Southerton Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, 1935.

The Confederates drove off Union defenders and seized some of the guns. For a few precious minutes, a portion of East Cemetery Hill was in Southern hands. But rushing over Cemetery Hill through the darkness from the west were reinforcements from the II Corps and the 75th Pennsylvania and 119th New York from the XI Corps determined to drive away the attackers. The Louisianans and North Carolinians waited anxiously for their own reinforcements to arrive, to no avail. Another attack from the west in the form of Rodes' division against Cemetery Hill miscarried. Without support, the Confederates were unable to hold the valuable high ground and withdrew down the hill to their own lines. Cemetery and East Cemetery Hill remained just out of General Lee's grasp.

East Cemetery Hill was in Union hands once more, but the sacrifice of both sides was evident after the battle. "General [Brig. Gen. Adelbert] Ames reformed his lines and extended aid to the hundreds of rebel soldiers lying wounded inside our lines," explained Lt. Edward C. Culp of the 25th Ohio. "It was a ghastly battlefield."<sup>6</sup> On the other side of the lines, the returning Confederates reached their jump-off point. "The rebels returned again to our street at ten p.m.," recorded Pennsylvania College mathematics professor Michael Jacobs. "Some of them expressed their most earnest indignation at the foreigners—the Dutchmen—for having shot down so many of their men."<sup>7</sup>

About the same time, the XI Corps' 82nd Illinois, 45th New York, 157th New York, and 61st Ohio were rushed farther east to Culp's Hill to reinforce the lone XII Corps brigade that had been left behind by General Slocum. Brigadier General George Greene's brigade was being pushed hard by Maj. Gen. Edward Johnson's Confederate division, and the right side of his line was buckling. The four regiments helped stabilize the line, some of the fighting taking place well after nightfall.<sup>8</sup>

The horrific fighting of July 2 was finally over, but the struggle to save shattered lives was still well underway. "The ground was covered with the groanings and moanings of the wounded," recalled XI Corps commander Howard in a description of the area on and around Cemetery Hill. "While the soldiers were sleeping, the medical men with their ambulances, their lanterns, and their stretchers

6 Edward C. Culp, in Tom J. Edwards, ed., *Raising the Banner of Freedom: The 25th Ohio Volunteer Infantry in the War of the Union* (Bloomington, IN, 2003), 91.

7 Jacobs, *Notes on the Rebel Invasion of Maryland and Pennsylvania and the Battle of Gettysburg* (Philadelphia, PA, 1864), 38.

8 Bachelder, Day 2 map.

... were going from point to point to do what little they could for the multitude of sufferers.”<sup>9</sup>

East Cemetery Hill became the main ambulance pickup point for the wounded and dying XI Corps men, most of whom ended up at George and Elizabeth Spangler’s farm. Many of the wounded were placed in and outside the packed Evergreen Cemetery gatehouse, where they were picked up later by the ambulances and transported to the XI Corps hospital. Those who died waiting for medical attention were buried in temporary graves in and near the cemetery.<sup>10</sup>

With help or on their own accord, some of the wounded walked from Cemetery Hill to the Spangler property. Private Southerton of the 75th Ohio, just 19 years old that July, helped Pvt. Norman Brooks, 22, make it to the hospital after Brooks was shot in the face during the night-time fight. “Holding against his face a piece of pants leg he had torn from his own uniform, Norman bent forward as he walked,” Southerton recalled years later. “As he adjusted the cloth I saw that a part of his jaw was shot away, many of his front teeth were gone. We made our way behind our battery, and were fairly safe.” But getting to the hospital was difficult. “Such a line of wounded men! Many on stretchers, many hobbling trying to make it under their own power,” explained Southerton. “To join the procession,” he continued,

Norman and I had to cross a corner of the cemetery. Fences and monuments were blown to bits. A shell hissed past my cheek. Some little distance beyond Culp’s Hill we came to a stone barn. The hospital, Dr. Wilson, was working frantically near a wide open doorway. He recognized us as I led Norman to him. If any one could help us, Dr. Wilson could. Other surgeons were working just as frantically. All by the light of a few lanterns hung on the walls. Hay was strewn about on the floor for beds for the wounded. At the doorway I saw a huge stack of amputated arms and legs, a stack as high as my head! The most horrible thing I ever saw in my life! I wish I had never seen it! I sickened. I hurried outside, kept out of the way of the stream of wounded that flowed to the hospital.<sup>11</sup>

9 Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard*, 431.

10 Kiefer, *History of the One Hundred and Fifty-Third Regiment*, 169.

11 “Reminiscences of William B. Southerton.” The wounded Confederates left on the hill after this fight were taken to several hospitals, including the XI Corps Spangler hospital.

Brooks survived his disfiguring wound and was transferred the following year to the Veteran Reserve Corps, which used disabled and chronically ill soldiers to perform light service such as guard duty and kitchen and hospital work. Southerton also survived Gettysburg and is believed to have lived to almost 100. Doctor Wilson, whom Brooks and Southerton sought on the Spangler farm, was surgeon Charles L. Wilson of the 75th Ohio. Wilson resigned from the army that October.<sup>12</sup>

Two Confederate privates died on George Spangler's property, both of whom were mortally wounded on East Cemetery Hill on the evening of July 2. North Carolinian James Russel was a 21-year-old farmer when he enlisted in 1861 in Charlotte. He was wounded at Sharpsburg (Antietam) on September 17, 1862, but rejoined the 6th North Carolina in time for the march north to Gettysburg. Russel was shot twice—once in his right knee and again in the upper forearm. When he died at the XI Corps hospital remains unknown. Thomas McCarty of the 8th Louisiana belonged to the tough and famous Louisiana Tigers. He was a native of Ireland and 38 years old at the time of his enlistment in 1861 in New Orleans. McCarty was wounded at the battle of Ox Hill on September 1, 1862, and captured near Fredericksburg, Virginia, in May 1863. He was soon paroled and made the march north into Pennsylvania. Like Russel, the date of McCarty's death passed unregistered. Both sets of remains were later exhumed and reburied somewhere in the South in the 1870s.<sup>13</sup>

Other Confederates found their way to the Spangler property. Private Silliman of the 17th Connecticut mentioned Pvt. Mark A. Hubert of Company K, 5th Texas Infantry, in a letter to his mother on July 15. "We also have two Confederates one from Texas, a fine intelligent man shot through the leg," penned Silliman from the Spangler property. "His name is Mark Hubert [Robertson's] brigade, Hood division Longstreet corps. The other is one of a Va. regt. struck in breast by a shell. I have doubts of his recovery."<sup>14</sup>

Private Hubert was wounded during the assault of the 5th Texas up the rocky slope of Little Round Top. The Texas regiment suffered 211 casualties out of 409 men taken into action that day. The "fine intelligent" Hubert, who was born in 1837, left the Spangler hospital on July 24 and, according to a diary he kept on the

12 [www.civilwardata.com/active/hdsquery.dll?SoldierHistory?U&385010](http://www.civilwardata.com/active/hdsquery.dll?SoldierHistory?U&385010). Accessed March 1, 2017.

13 From notes prepared for the Gettysburg Foundation by Gettysburg Licensed Battlefield Guide Wayne Motts, formerly of the Adams County Historical Society and now chief executive officer of the Civil War Museum in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

14 Silliman, *A New Canaan Private in the Civil War*, 45.



Sgt. Nelson W. Jones

*Collections of Maine Historical Society*

blank pages of a New Testament, arrived at a prison hospital in Baltimore the following day. "I will be truly glad when my time comes to be exchanged," he admitted on July 27. "The Yanks treat us as well as I could expect, but I prefer Dixie's hospitality."<sup>15</sup>

Of his time at the XI Corps hospital, he wrote, "For three weeks after I was wounded I had nothing but a shirt." Hubert was still suffering from leg and foot pain, swelling, drainage issues, and bleeding when he left the Spangler farm, symptoms that would continue for months thereafter. "This morning," he penned while in Baltimore on September 24, "I took a knife and cut

it open it runs mostly blood." Hubert was paroled and put on a steamship bound for Richmond on September 26, his 27th birthday. His wound eventually healed and he lived to age 70.<sup>16</sup>

Given the bloody chaos on a sprawling battlefield like Gettysburg, it is not surprising that many wounded never made it to their assigned division or corps hospital. One example was Sgt. Nelson W. Jones of the 3rd Maine, Brig. Gen. Hobart Ward's brigade, Maj. Gen. David Birney's division, Sickles' III Corps. Jones, who was 18 at the time of his enlistment in 1861, was fighting in the Peach

15 M. A. Hubert, diary, 1863, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, Univ. of Texas at Austin.

16 [www.findagrave.com/memorial/44015126/mark-anthony-hubert](http://www.findagrave.com/memorial/44015126/mark-anthony-hubert). Accessed March 1, 2017.



Orchard on July 2 when he was hit. He was taken to the Spangler hospital, probably by someone from the Artillery Reserve because the 3rd Maine was fighting alongside Reserve batteries that had been parked on the Spangler farm.

Jones was a good soldier and promoted from private to sergeant in 1862. He also was a good son, taking time to write letters home while worrying about his parents and their farm work in Palermo, Maine. “[I]t is so lonsome here that I do wish I was at home or some where else for a spell but I don’t worry any only I am afraid you will get out of health doing your work alone,” he wrote to his parents on August 7, 1861. I sometimes think I ought to have staid at home and helped you instead of inlisting and come out here to fight. . . . Father please write me how your health is and if it is hard work for you to do the work all alone and if you can do your falls work without hired help if you cant I will try and help you all I can.” Jones never made it home to help his parents on the farm. He died at the XI Corps hospital and was buried there before being exhumed months later. He rests today in the Maine plot of Soldiers’ National Cemetery.<sup>17</sup>

Corpsmen spent the night of July 2-3 under lantern light searching for, picking up, and delivering a stream of the latest mass of wounded. “About eleven at night the ambulances were busy collecting and carrying to the rear great loads of mangled and dying humanity,” recalled V Corps surgeon Joseph Thomas of the 118th Pennsylvania. “The wagon trains, with tents and supplies, had not yet arrived, and the wounded were deposited on the ground. . . . As they were removed from the ambulances they were placed in long rows, with no reference to the nature or gravity of their injuries, nor condition or rank. Friend and foe alike, as they had been picked up promiscuously, were there laid side by side. Soon the ambulances ceased their visits,” he continued, “as they had gathered up all that were accessible, or could be found in the darkness. . . . Opiates were administered to alleviate pain and water supplied to appease their thirst.”<sup>18</sup>

Jacob Smith of the XI Corps’ 107th Ohio, helped carry the wounded to the ambulance wagons. “The last comrade we took back in the evening, we had to carry to the hospital [on a stretcher], a distance of more than a mile,” he said, “the wagons having been driven away before we came. After hunting up our wagons we passed the night in them.”<sup>19</sup>

17 [www.soldierstudies.org/index.php?action=view\\_letter&Letter=1499](http://www.soldierstudies.org/index.php?action=view_letter&Letter=1499), March 1, 2017.

18 Samuel Cecil Stanton, ed., *The Military Surgeon: Journal of the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States*, vol. 32 (Chicago, IL, 1913), 405.

19 Smith, *Camps and Campaigns*, 103.



The size of the XI Corps hospital staff of stewards, nurses, and orderlies increased throughout the battle to handle the overflow crowd of wounded. Corporal John Irvin of the 154th New York recorded that 12 to 14 men from his regiment alone were detailed to the Spangler hospital on July 2.<sup>20</sup>

While the medical personnel worked as best they could under trying circumstances, General Meade called together his top generals for a council of war in the tiny Lydia Leister house on the Taneytown Road. He asked them: Should we stay in our present position or retire? If we remain, shall we attack or await an attack of the enemy? If we wait, how long?

The overwhelming decision was to “stay and fight it out,” as General Slocum advised, and that the army remain on the defensive and let the Confederates attack. If General Lee didn’t attack, the Army of the Potomac could then choose the right time and place to attack him.<sup>21</sup>

The army would stay put. The hospitals could expect another day of horrific arrivals.

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### Spangler Farm Short Story

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Lieutenant Gulian V. Weir, Battery C, 5th US Artillery, arrived on the Spangler property in the early morning of July 2 with the First Regular Brigade of the Artillery Reserve. The son of a West Point professor was a respected and honored artilleryman who had served since almost the beginning of the war and had earned many accolades. His hard-earned reputation would take a hit, however, soon after Weir left the Spangler farm several hours later with the battery he commanded.

The 5th US was placed just east of the Emmitsburg Road on the Codori farm. There, it faced both artillery and infantry fire and, out of canister, was nearly swallowed up by Colonel Lang’s Florida infantry at about 7:30 p.m. Both Weir and his horse were shot, though Weir not severely. In his official report, he observed that everything after his wounding “seemed to be very much confused.” He ordered his battery to withdraw, but in the process lost three guns to the Confederates. II Corps commander General Hancock angrily charged Weir with cowardice. Weir returned to the Spangler property that night with what was left of his battery. He remained there until early afternoon July 3, when his heavily damaged battery played a key role in defending against the heart of Pickett’s Charge

20 Edwin Dwight Northrup Papers. Box 16, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University.

21 Minutes of war council, July 2, 1863, *OR*, 27, pt. 1, 73.

Lt. Gulian V. Weir

*Weir Farm National Historic Site*

near the Bloody Angle. Despite his success on July 3 and through the war until July 2, Weir never got over his forced retreat and embarrassing reprimand from Hancock.

Weir returned to Gettysburg in 1885 and walked the Codori property where his Battery C, 5th US Artillery, had been swept away. A wave of anguish swept over him upon reliving the trauma. The return to Gettysburg, he admitted, made him “a broken man.” He wrote several anguished letters to Hancock that practically beg the former general for a forgiveness that would never come.

“All I am working for now General is that where Gettysburg is shown I may have my place with Battery ‘C’ a clear conscience and record, to be able to talk about Gettysburg or any other battle that I was in, nothing more. . . . And, that you will, if you can to your entire satisfaction, in course of time, give me a few lines as to my work at Gettysburg.” Weir wrote again five days later when he did not hear back from Hancock: “I fear I may have expressed myself so bitterly as to incur your displeasure.” Three more Weir-to-Hancock letters followed within as many weeks, the last one claiming “There is much in my letters of November 15 and 25th which now, looking at in a calmer mood, I would rather had been left unsaid—I wrote too much as I felt, and regret very much having done so—I thought I had lived down all bitter feeling on the subject.” It is believed Hancock never answered Weir’s letters.

The former artillery commander lived an emotionally tortured year after his 1885 visit to Gettysburg before putting a gun against his chest in July 1886 and pulling the trigger. He was 48. Weir left behind a wife and six children.<sup>22</sup>



22 OR 27, pt. 1, 880; <https://unionveterans.wordpress.com/2012/04/03/haunted-by-gettysburg/>. Accessed March 3, 2017; Weir letter to Winfield Scott Hancock, November 25, 1885, in *Bachelder Papers*, vol. 2, 1,153; Weir to Hancock, November 30, 1885, in *Bachelder Papers*, vol. 2, 1,154; Weir letter to Hancock, December 15, 1885, in *The Bachelder Papers*, vol. 2, 1,161.

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## Ruch Report No. 2

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### **His Path to Spangler**

**Pvt. Reuben F. Ruch, Company F, 153rd Pennsylvania**

“The morning of the 2d of July I got downstairs [at Trinity German Reformed Church] to see what was going on. Here I met a Johnnie on guard. He belonged to a North Carolina regiment and as he seemed to be a nice kind of a Reb I struck up a conversation with him. . . . He said there was no use fighting in the North, for he had never seen such a rich country as Pennsylvania, and that our towns were yet full of men, in fact a fellow would not miss those that were in the army. I told him that he had better stay north when the Rebel army retreated south, which they would in a day or two. That our people would not kill him and that he should stay north till the war was over. He told me that the old flag was good enough for him, that he lived in a rented house, and never owned a negro, that he would take my advice and stay north but for one thing. He had a wife and two children . . . and if he did stay north, and the Rebels found it out they would use his family meaner than dogs.

“I went back upstairs . . . I had a grand view of the greater part of the battlefield. . . . A little before sundown I saw a stir and a moving about of the Rebs under the window where I was sitting, as if they were getting ready for some kind of a move. I also saw them drinking out of a barrel. The head of the barrel was knocked in. One would get a tin cup full and three or four would drink out of the same cup before it was empty. . . . It was straight whiskey, and they were getting ready to charge the Eleventh Corps [on East Cemetery Hill].

“It was between sundown and dark when they started in three lines of battle. . . . Every man took his place, giving the Rebel yell, by this time our grape and canister began to plow gaps through their ranks. . . . To see grape and canister cut gaps through ranks looks rough. I could see heads, arms, and legs flying amid the dust and smoke . . . it reminded me much of a wagon load of pumpkins drawn up a hill and the end gate coming out, and the pumpkins rolling and bounding down the hill. The only fault I found with this charge was that it got dark too soon, and I could not see the end of it. . . . The slaughter was terrible.”<sup>23</sup>

23 Kiefer, *History of the One Hundred and Fifty-Third Regiment*, 218-220.