

To quote this book, use the following: Benedict, George Grenville. Vermont in the Civil War. Burlington VT: Free Press Association, 1888 (Note chapters 1-20 are in volume 1, chapters 21-32 in volume 2. Page numbers are true to the original.)

CHAPTER XIX.

The First Brigade, concluded—Return to Petersburg—The Winter of 1864-5 in the Trenches—Capture of the Enemy's intrenched Picket Line by the Sixth Corps—Action and Casualties of the Vermont Brigade—Arduous Picket Duty—The Final Grand Assault—The Vermont Brigade heads the Entering Wedge of the Sixth Corps—The Vermonters storm the Works in their Front, captures nineteen Guns and Many Prisoners, and push in to Lee's Headquarters—The Sixth Corps take Three miles of Works—Casualties of the Vermont Regiments—Fall of Richmond and Closing Scenes of the War—Pursuit of Lee—Last Skirmish at Sailor's Creek—The Surrender at Appomattox—Last Marches and Reviews of the Brigade—General Grant's Farewell Address—The Final Muster Out.

The brigade went to Washington by rail, and found the ride, which occupied a night and half a day, a severe experience. The night was very cold. The men were in open coal cars, and suffered greatly from cold and exposure to the storm. At 2 P. M. of December 10th the brigade arrived at Washington and at once embarked on transports for City Point, where it landed on Monday, December 12th. During its absence important advantages had been gained by the Army of the Potomac in front of Petersburg, prominent among which was the storming of Fort Harrison, by Stannard's division of the Eighteenth corps, in September; and the military railroad, connecting with the Petersburg and City Point railroad and passing along the rear of the Union lines, south of Petersburg, had been built. By this the division was taken on the 12th to the left of the lines beyond the Weldon railroad. Here, near the scene of the unfortunate affair of the 24th of June, the brigade bivouacked for one night. Next day it moved west about a mile and a half into the works on

the right of the Squirrel Level road, relieving troops of the Second corps, which were moved farther to the left.

The Sixth Corps, when here concentrated, occupied some two miles of the works, extending west from the Weldon Railroad to within three miles of the Southside Railroad, which was one of the two remaining lines of railroad connecting the Southern States with the Confederate capital. This portion of the works faced to the northeast toward Petersburg. To the left of it, the Union lines bent to the south, almost at a right angle, extending southwest for three miles or more, parallel with the Confederate lines, which stretched midway between the Union lines and the Boydton Plank Road.¹

For months the confederates had been strengthening their works and adding additional defences, till before the close of the winter their works extended from the river, northeast of Petersburg, round to Hatcher's Run on the southwest, with a front of 17 miles. They consisted of an outer line of earthworks, connected by breastworks, the latter revetted with logs, having a deep ditch in front, and further protected by lines of abatis, chevaux de fries and fraise. Batteries, at frequent intervals, swept the approaches with a cross fire, and rifle pits protected the picket lines in front. The results of the various attacks which had been made upon these works had not been such as to encourage further attempts, and they were regarded as well nigh impregnable. Within these was a second line of forts and redans, connected by breastworks, surrounding Petersburg in a line from one to two miles distant from the city. The Union works encircled the outer Confederate line, at varying distances according to the nature of the ground, and consisted like the latter of redoubts built at intervals of half a mile or more, connected by single and in some places double lines of rifle pits. The por-

¹ Called by some Southern writers the Bowdoin Plank road.

tion manned by the Vermont brigade was between Forts Tracy and Urmston, which were built and strengthened during the winter, the regiments being stationed in the following order from right to left: Second, Eleventh, Fifth, Sixth, Third, Fourth. A line of pickets was kept out about half a mile in front, in close proximity to the rebel pickets. The corps of A. P. Hill occupied the Confederate works in front.

After the failure of the affair of the Mine, on the 30th of July, efforts to carry Petersburg by direct assault had been abandoned by the Union generals; and the extensions of Lieut. General Grant's lines to the southwest had met with such persistent opposition that it was plain that no decisive result of siege operations could be expected before spring. The troops made themselves comfortable with unusual care, by building warm huts of split pine logs, while the officers' quarters and hospitals were fitted up with especial care. The details for picket duty were large; and as the winter was one of unusual severity, the duty on the picket lines was full of hardship. By mutual consent, however, there was little or no firing on the picket lines. The opposing pickets often shouted to each other in not unfriendly conversation; and there were meetings for exchange of coffee and tobacco and even for impromptu card parties between the lines. The daily details for fatigue duty on the forts and works were also large, and comparatively little attention was given to drills. Once in a while a night alarm called all hands to arms. On one night in particular, in December, following the receipt of news that Sherman had reached the sea and taken Savannah, the pickets along the other portions of the lines were firing all night under special orders. The men on each side, however, took the friendly precaution of notifying those on the other when they were about to fire. Along the front of the Sixth Corps, however, there was no firing at this time, but instead a good deal of talking between the opposing

pickets, the rebels being especially curious to know what all the cheering on the Union side, these days, was for.

This life in the trenches was of course in strong contrast with the campaigning in green fields and pleasant groves, the milk and honey and grapes, as well as with the pitched battles, of the valley campaign. Around the campfires the men never tired of recalling the good things, and recounting the exploits, of their service under Sheridan. The appearance of new batteries and earthworks from time to time along the enemy's lines, showed how industriously Lee was strengthening his position; but any discouragement on the part of his besiegers on that account was counterbalanced by the reports brought in by the numerous deserters, of destitution within their camps. The pinched faces and insufficient clothing of many of the deserters confirmed their statements of distress, especially during the first part of the winter. After that the Confederate commissariat improved; and the establishment of reserve depots of provisions at Richmond, Lynchburg and Danville enabled Lee to feed his soldiers better.

During the closing months of the year the thinned ranks of the Vermont brigade, which had been reduced to 1,800 effective men at the close of the campaign in the Valley, were strengthened by the return of a number of convalescents, and at the opening of the year 1865, the morning reports gave an aggregate of 2,436 officers and men present for duty. Major Enoch E. Johnson commanded the Second regiment in the absence of Lieut. Colonel Tracy; Lieut. Colonel Horace W. Floyd, the Third; Colonel George P. Foster, the Fourth; Major Eugene O. Cole, the Fifth; Major Sumner H. Lincoln, the Sixth, and Lieut. Colonel Hunsdon the Eleventh. The sick list of the brigade was large, aggregating 1349, or one sick man for every two well ones; but the troops were well supplied by the military railroad, which had been extended to Patrick's Station, in the rear of the quarters of

the brigade; and such active operations as were conducted in front of Petersburg fell, for the time, to other troops.

Early in February, the headquarters flag of the brigade,² torn to tatters by shot and shell, was transmitted to Adjutant General Washburn of Vermont, by General L. A. Grant, with a list of sixteen battles through which it has been carried without dishonor and in which 3,116 Vermonters had been killed and wounded, under it.

On the 6th of February, the Union lines were extended to the left, to Hatcher's Run, after a fight in which the Fifth corps lost about 1,200 men, and the enemy nearly an equal number. The left of the lines of the Sixth Corps was also advanced, taking the enemy's intrenchments at Fort Fisher and the signal tower on a height to the left of the Vermont brigade. The brigade remained in the works to the left of Fort Tracy, through February and March. The friendly understanding between the Confederate and Union pickets continued, and chopping parties of the two armies, cutting wood for the camp fires, sometimes mingled freely. As the winter wore on deserters came in in increasing numbers. One night an entire company, 34 in number, of North Carolina troops. Leaving their captain asleep at the outpost, came in and gave themselves up; and on one day in February, no less than seventy-nine deserters came in to the lines of the Sixth Corps, one party bringing with them a mule team.³

Beyond doubt, it was a gloomy times behind the Confederate lines, during the month of March. General Sherman,

² A triangle of blue, with the white cross of the division in the centre.

³ February 24th, General Lee, in a report to President Davis, said: "Since the 12th inst. The desertions in two divisions of Hill's corps amount to about 400." On the 25th, he said: "Hundreds of men are deserting nightly." On the 28th, he reported "1,200 more desertions." "These men," he added, "generally went off in bands, taking arms and ammunition. The greatest number of desertions have occurred among the North Carolina troops, who have fought as gallantly as any."

having occupied Columbia and Charleston, S. C., was marching north through North Carolina. Sheridan, starting from the valley with 10,000, had swept around the west and north of Richmond, destroyed the James River Canal, and, breaking up all the railroad tracks and bridges along his route, had joined the Army of the Potomac. Thomas was organizing important offensive operations in East Tennessee. Canby was moving against Mobile. Pope was organizing a spring campaign west of the Mississippi.

It was becoming plain to well informed observers on both sides that the end was approaching. On the 2d of March, General Lee addressed a letter to General Grant, proposing to meet him to discuss an "adjustment of the present unhappy difficulties," and a method of closing the war, by means of a "military convention." This meeting was declined by Grant, under orders from President Lincoln (to whom the request was referred) to hold no conference with Lee, except for the surrender of the latter's army. Nothing remained for Lee, but to fight the thing out. He still had 70,000 men around Richmond. If, abandoning the confederate capital, he could effect a junction with General Johnston, who, with an army of 25,000 men was opposing Sherman's northern march, the war might possibly be prolonged. In anxious consultations with President Davis, it was determined that as soon as the condition of the roads should permit, the Army of Northern Virginia should make a push for Danville.; unite with Johnston; attack and destroy Sherman; and then turn to confront Grant, while the seat of the Confederate government should be established farther south.

Anticipating such an abandonment of Petersburg and Richmond, General Grant, on the 25th of March, issued orders for a movement around Lee's right in order to cut off the Southside and Danville railroads, hem Lee in his works, and compel either his surrender or a pitched battle. The

two movements were in preparation, on the opposing sides, at the same time. That on the part of the enemy began by a formidable sortie against the works on Grant's right, by which Lee doubtless hoped to induce Grant to draw in his left, and leave the way more open to the west. It was made by General Gordon, before daylight on March 25th, and was an entire failure. His storming columns indeed carried Fort Stedman,⁴ and batteries 10, 11 and 12 on each side of it; but they were repulsed from the forts on the right and left of Fort Stedman. Their retreat from the latter was cut off by the troops of the Ninth corps, and before eight o'clock that morning the works were all recaptured and the Union lines fully restored. Gordon left 1,949 of his men prisoners in the hands of the Ninth corps, and took away 120 bodies of his dead, under a flag of truce.

Generals Grant and Meade were at the headquarters of the former, at City Point, when word of the capture of Fort Stedman came to them, by courier, Gordon's men having cut the telegraph wires. They surmised that the sortie might mean that Lee was leaving; and General Meade, on his return to the front, whither he hurried at once, ordered Generals Wright and Humphreys to push out and feel of the enemy and take advantage of any change, if the enemy had been moving troops from that part of his lines.⁵ This was not the case; but nevertheless Wright and Humphreys secured an important advantage in that quarter. As the Vermont troops took part at three points in this transaction, "Petersburg, March 25th," is properly included in the official lists of the battles and engagements of the Vermont

⁴ This was one of the redans on the east of Petersburg which were carried by Brooks's division, and Stannard's brigade of the Eighteenth corps, in June 1864.

⁵ General Humphreys had anticipated this order and sent out some strong reconnoissances.

regiments. The details relating to their share of it were as follows:

The firing around Fort Stedman, before daybreak aroused the troops all along the lines; and though seven miles away, the Vermonters stood to arms with the rest of the Sixth Corps. They stacked arms when word came that the Ninth corps had re-established its line; but remained in line till about noon, when orders came to be ready to move. Tents were quickly struck and knapsacks packed; for the advance might be part of a general movement of the army. At about three o'clock P. M. the picket line of the third division (now commanded by General Truman Seymour, a native Vermonter) in front of Forts Fisher and Welch, composed of men of the Tenth Vermont and Fourteenth New Jersey, supported by two Ohio regiments, all under command of Lieut. Colonel Damon of the Tenth Vermont regiment, who relieved the division field officer of the day for the purpose, advanced against the opposing picket line, nearly a mile long. The Union skirmishers were met by a sharp fire of musketry, from the rifle-pits in front, and of artillery from the Confederate forts and batteries farther back, and though they reached the enemy's rifle-pits at several points, the supports could not be brought up, and the attack failed. Damon brought back his men in good order to the line from which they started, and they formed a part of the skirmish line for the fresh assault which was now ordered. General Getty was directed to make this with this division, assisted by Keifer's brigade of the third division. Getty's command filed out of the works and formed rapidly in front and to the left of Fort Fisher, under a lively artillery fire from the enemy's batteries to the left, to which the guns of the Third Vermont battery in Fort Fisher, firing over the heads of the Vermont troops, and the artillery in Fort Welch, replied. The Vermont brigade formed the left of the attacking force, disposed in three lines, the first line consisting of the Second

and Sixth regiments, the second line of the two battalions of the Eleventh, and the third line of the Third, Fourth and Fifth regiments.

At four o'clock, the waving of a flag from Fort Fisher, from the parapet of which General Wright superintended the movement, gave the signal for the advance, and the lines moved forward. The enemy's artillery played upon them with redoubled activity, and the firing was continuous from the rifle pits in front; but dashing forward on the double quick the brigade reached and with a cheer swept over the breastworks, planted its colors in the trenches, and captured most of the enemy's pickets posted in them. Hyde's and Keifer's brigades in the like manner carried the rifle pits to the right of those taken by the Vermonters; and the men, lying down under the scarp of the captured breastworks, obtained cover from the enemy's artillery, which almost enfiladed the line.

The Second Vermont regiment with a company of the Eleventh pushed on from the captured line to the Jones house, a quarter of a mile farther; but as the rest of the brigade had halted at the rifle pits, Lieut. Colonel Tracy brought his command back to them. The Jones house was subsequently occupied by the enemy's sharpshooters, when a detachment of men from companies D, H and F of the Second was sent forward under Captain W. B. Hurlburt, which drove out the Confederates and burned the house. A section of the Third Vermont battery was advanced to the captured works; and though General Hill made several vigorous efforts to re-take them, by moving out strong bodies of troops at various points, the latter were everywhere repulsed with loss. The Second corps, in like manner, carried about half a mile of rifle pits on the left of those taken by Getty.

During the last attempt of the enemy to re-take the portion of the line taken by the Second corps, about sunset, a

detachment of 150 men of the Fifth regiment, under Major Cole, was sent to report to Lieut. Colonel Damon of the Tenth, who with them and a section of a battery was directed to dislodge a party of the enemy posted in and about a house, to the left of the line of the Sixth Corps, who were annoying the latter. This service was performed, the house being riddled with shot and shell and the enemy's sharpshooters driven from it, when the detachment returned to the line.

After nightfall the breastworks were reversed, and the captured intrenchments, a mile and a half long, were permanently held by the Union troops.

Of 905 Confederates taken in the rifle pits that afternoon, 547, a large share of whom surrendered to the Vermonters, were captured by Getty's command. The full importance of this brilliant affair was seen eight days later; for it was on the ground control of which was thus gained, that Getty's division was formed for the final victorious assault; and there is as high authority as General A. A. Humphreys for the statement that "it was this capture of the intrenched picket line of the enemy that made it practicable for General Wright to carry the enemy's main line of intrenchments by assault on the morning of the 2d of April."

The loss of the brigade was small, the rapidity with which the movement was made rendering the enemy's musketry fire less effective, while his artillery, though vigorously served, was firing at long range and did comparatively slight damage to the troops. The casualties were as follows:

	Killed.	Wounded.	Total.
Second Vermont regiment,	2	8	10
Third Vermont regiment,	0	3	3
Fourth Vermont regiment,	0	2	2
Fifth Vermont regiment,	1	7	8
Sixth Vermont regiment,	0	1	1
Eleventh Vermont regiment,	1	12	13
Total,	4	33	37

One man of the Fifth and two of the Eleventh died of

their wounds. In the operations on his left and right this day, Lee lost 1,000 men killed and wounded, and 3,000 taken prisoners. Getty lost 450 killed and wounded, the Second corps 700, and the Ninth 800.

From the advanced ground thus gained by Getty's division, the works of the enemy's main line, about seven hundred yards away, could be distinctly surveyed. They consisted of strong redans, connected by heavy breastworks, revetted and surmounted by logs. In front of these was a deep ditch, guarded by two and often three well constructed lines of abatis, between which bristled a fraise of sharpened stakes. The general appearance of these works was not calculated to encourage assaults; and the uneasiness of the enemy indicated that the utmost vigilance would be necessary in order to hold the vantage ground already gained. Strict orders were issued to the Union pickets and no sleep was permitted to the picket reserves. Skirmishes were frequent along the picket lines. In one of these, before daybreak on the 27th, the Vermont brigade was put under arms and portions of every regiment were engaged. The attacking party was repulsed with loss, after having broken into the line and captured four men of the Fourth regiment and 22 of the . Twenty-three men were wounded in this affair, the Second, and Eleventh regiment each having five men hurt, the Third one, and the Fifth seven. One officer, Lieutenant Carlton of the Fourth, was wounded.

On the 28th of March a notable meeting took place at Gen. Grant's headquarters at City Point. President Lincoln had come thither from Washington to encourage rather than to direct. General Sherman was there, having come up from Goldsboro, N. C., to consult the General-in-Chief. General Meade, commanding the Army of the Potomac, and General Sheridan, just arrived from his last cavalry expedition, were also present. The conference developed no conflict of views or reason for modifying General Grant's plan for a movement

from his left, around the right of Lee's lines, and it began, as previously ordered, on the 29th.

Starting early in the morning of that day, the Second and Fifth corps moved by the left and rear to the southwest, crossed Hatcher's Run without opposition, and then turning northward moved toward the White Oak road and the extreme right of Lee's intrenchments. Sheridan, at the same time, with the Cavalry corps, marching with a wider sweep to the south, moved to occupied Dinwiddie Court House, six miles south of the White Oak road. Next day, in spite of a pouring rain which turned the whole country into a swamp, the infantry were pushed up toward the White Oak road, while Sheridan demonstrated toward Five Forks, four miles east of Lee's right. Lee met these movements by sending Fitz Hugh Lee's cavalry and Pickett's division of infantry, each about 6,000 strong, to Five Forks, where they fortified their position with great activity by night and day. Sheridan saw the opportunity to cut off and capture Pickett. For this he would need some infantry, and he knew what troops he wanted. He sent word to Grant: "I could with the sixth Corps turn the enemy's right, or break through his lines; but I would not like the Fifth Corps to make such an attempt." Grant replied: "It will be impossible to give you the Sixth Corps. It is the centre of our line; besides Wright thinks he can go through the line where he is, and it is desirable to have troops and a commander there who feel so." So Sheridan took the Fifth Corps, and with that and his cavalry, on the 1st of April, the battle of Five Forks was fought and won by Sheridan and Warren. Pickett was routed with the loss of six guns and of half his corps captured. The rest of his command, cut off from Petersburg, fled to the west, pursued till nightfall by the Union infantry and cavalry; but favored by the darkness they finally made their way, but a circuit to the north, to the

cover of some intrenchments and of troops sent out by Lee to meet them.

A general bombardment of the enemy's lines was ordered by General Grant as soon as the news of Sheridan's success reached him; and all through the night, the flashes of cannon and of bursting shells lit up the opposing lines,-- a grim prelude to the grand assault which was ordered for four o'clock the next morning.

THE FINAL ASSAULT ON THE LINES OF PETERSBURG.

This had been in preparation for three days; and, as Grant's reply to Sheridan shows, the Sixth Corps was also ordered to attack on the right, and Humphreys and Ord were to push in on the left if they found the enemy leaving their front. General Wright had been eager to attack for some days, and had promised General Meade that he "would make the fur fly" when he got the word. "If the corps does as well as I expect," he said, "we will have broken through the rebel lines in fifteen minutes from the word go." "I like the way Wright talks," said Grant, "and I heartily approve."

General Wright selected Getty's division for the assaulting column; and General Getty gave the Vermont brigade the honor of guiding and leading the column. That these selections were not owing to any accident of position is evident from the fact that the point selected for the assault was over a mile to the left of the portion of the Union lines occupied by the division; and it was marched thither past thousands of other troops. As for the brigade, it had fairly earned the right to this crowning opportunity. How it improve it, will be seen.

The morning report of the brigade for the 1st of April,

showed a total of 2,209 officers and men present for duty.⁶ Lieut. Colonel Tracy, having returned to his regiment, was in command of the Second. Lieut. Colonel Floyd commanded the Third. In the absence of Colonel Foster, who was at home on leave of absence, and of Major Pratt, who was a paroled prisoner, the fourth was commanded by the senior Captain, George H. Amidon. The Fifth was commanded by Lieut. Colonel Kennedy; the Sixth by Major Sperry, Lieut. Colonel being ill with fever; and the by Lieut. Colonel Hunsdon.

The portion of the enemy's lines to be assaulted by the division was determined after careful consideration, based on examination and reports of several general officers. It extended from a point back of the Jones House, to a point opposite the left of the line of the Sixth Corps, in front of Forts Fisher and Welch. The character of the intrenchments to be stormed has been already described. They were held at that point by Davis's and McComb's brigades, of Heth's division of A. P. Hill's corps. The precise point of attack was first suggested by General L. A. Grant. General Grant's statement in regard to this is as follows:

"I had discovered to our left and front and a little to the left of Fort Fisher, that there was an opening in the rebel works, at a ravine, in which water flowed and which had been filled with a thick growth of pine timber. This timber in front had recently been cut away by the rebels for firewood, which disclosed the fact that the works did not cross the ravine. The breastworks and abatis came down on either side, leaving a space of about two rods, thickly dotted with pine stumps. A few rods to the right of the ravine was a small opening in the abatis, which had been made for teams to come out for wood. Knowing that a vulnerable point of attack was sought for, I called General Getty's attention to

⁶ Over 1,500 being sick, absent on leave, or on detached duty.

this place, and he in turn called the attention of Generals Wright and Meade. All came down and we went out together to examine it as well as could be done at a distance. It was decided to make this the point of attack, and the Old (Vermont) brigade was selected to form the entering wedge, and to lead the attack. Orders were given the night previous for my brigade to move out at twelve o'clock, and to take the position that I might select as most favorable for the purpose; and for the other troops to follow." About midnight the brigade left its camp, without knapsacks and with uncapped guns, and moving silently to the left, passed out over the breastworks to the right of Fort Welch, and through openings in the abatis made for the purpose, and thence moved into position, upon ground selected personally by General L. A. Grant, close in the rear of the portion of the captured picket line, and facing the foot of the ravine. The other two brigades of the division followed and took position on the right of Grant. Seymour's division was in support, to the left and rear of the Vermont brigade.

The Vermont brigade was closed in mass, by battalion, in the following order from front to rear: Fifth, Second, Sixth, Fourth, Third, Second battalion Eleventh, First battalion Eleventh. Axe-men to cut away the opposing abatis were placed in the front line, and artillerymen with rammers and primers with which to turn and serve captured cannon, accompanied the column. As the enemy's picket line was not over three hundred yards away, officers and men were ordered to hug the ground and preserve the utmost silence till the order to advance should be given. The regiments of the brigade were directed, after gaining the enemy's works, to advance to and deploy upon a crest beyond the works, in order to prevent trouble from any hostile reinforcements which might be formed under cover of this elevation, for an effort to retake the works. Strict orders were given to all the troops to charge without firing, and not to pursue after

carrying the enemy's works; but to halt, re-form and await further orders.⁷

About 2 o'clock A. M., and while some of the troops of the other brigades were moving into position, the pickets in front, by some mischance or owing to an ill-judged order, unfortunately commenced firing. This brought a vigorous return from the enemy's skirmishers, which took serious effect on the massed troops lying on the ground or moving up to the position in the darkness, and threatened for a few moments to endanger the whole plan, by precipitating the fighting; but though many casualties occurred, especially in Hyde's brigade, the officers held back their commands, and the men took their wounds without uttering word or firing shot. During this firing, and shortly before the signal for the advance was given, General L. A. Grant, while lying on the ground with his staff, heads to the front, behind the last line of the brigade, was struck in the left side of his head by a minié ball, which cut through his hat and scalp, but fortunately glanced from the skull without inflicting a mortal injury. It stunned him for the time being, and he was taken to the rear, and Lieut. Colonel Tracy assumed command of the brigade.

For some three hours, the troops awaited daylight and the order to advance. The night was very dark, the night-air chilly and raw, and the ground on which the men were stretched damp. They lay shivering and almost benumbed, listening for the signal gun. In front all became still on the enemy's lines; but from the right came the distant sounds of artillery from the lines of the Ninth Corps.

At four o'clock, the hour fixed for the assault, it was still too dark for the men to see their way; but half an hour later,

⁷ "The orders were read at the head of every company, and I am told that the remark was frequent among the men: 'Well, good-by, boys. This means death.' Full well the officers and veterans realized that they were undertaking a forlorn hope."—Capt. Hazard Stevens, of Getty's staff.

the signal gun was fired from Fort Fisher by the Third Vermont battery. Heavy cannonading was still going on in front of the Ninth corps at the time, and the signal was not distinguished. Within ten minutes, however, Colonel Tracy learned that hit had been given, and promptly gave the order to advance. The troops sprang to their feet, started forward as rapidly as could have been expected of men who for hours had been lying motionless and chilled by the night damps, sprang over the rifle-pits in front of them, and pressed resolutely to the assault. The brigades on right and left, which had waited for the Vermonters, started as soon as the Vermont brigade was well under way; and the other two divisions of the sixth corps, farther back, followed, the whole forming a mighty wedge of 14,000 men. Steadily and silently the columns moved onward till the heads of them had traversed about two-thirds of the distance between the opposing picket lines, when the enemy's pickets, discovering the movement, opened a scattering fire, which flashed at intervals along the front for a minute, and then ceased as the Confederate skirmishers fled to the works behind them. Silence was of course no longer necessary in the charging columns; and the response to the volley was a cheer which rose mightily on the still air and, in the words of Major Merritt Barber, assistant adjutant general of the brigade, whose graphic report of this day's work leaves little to be supplied by the historian, "told to friend and foe that the Sixth Corps was on the charge." The cheer was followed by an impetuous rush for the enemy's works, undefined in the dim twilight, but soon to be outlined with fire, as the startled enemy, manning his breastworks, opened a heavy rolling fire of musketry from a front of half a mile, to which was soon added the broader flashes and heavier sounds of his artillery, and the rush and whiz of hostile missiles, as shrapnel and grape and canister hurtled through the air and swept the ground. Coming largely from the left the

artillery fire both crossed and enfiladed the lines, and the columns wavered and portions halted. But only for a moment. Encouraged by their officers and headed by the leading spirits in each organization, the men started on with a rush which soon carried them for the most part beyond the line of the artillery fire, and they had only the musketry to face. Officers and men vied for each other in the race for the works, and all organization was lost in the eagerness and enthusiasm of the troops. The lines of abatis were reached and brushed away like cobwebs, and the men, cheering like mad, dashed through the ditch and poured over the works in a resistless torrent. The first man, as it is confidently believed, to spring down from the parapet into the ranks which defended the works was Captain Charles G. Gould of the Fifth Vermont. That regiment led the column, and Captain Gould's company was next to the extreme left company in the regimental line. Under shouted orders to "bear to the left," coming from whom or for what purposes does not distinctly appear, that portion of the regiment became separated from the rest, and moved to the left, out of the ravine. Here the enemy's intrenchments projected at an angle, bringing the works at that point somewhat nearer to the head of the column than those directly in front. There was as yet not light enough to disclose the points most open to attack; but the enemy's artillery was firing from the angle, and rallying a handful of men, and followed by Lieutenant Pratt of his company and by Color Sergeant Jackson Sargent, with the regimental colors, Gould made a dash for the battery, pushed through the abatis, made his way through the ditch, mounted the parapet, and sprang inside the works. In the melee which followed he was bayoneted in his face and back, and received a sabre cut in the head, but killed his first assailant before he was placed hors de combat. He was followed by a few men of the Fifth, and with the assistance of some of the Sixth regiment, the angle, with two guns

planted in it, was taken, its defenders scattering to the rear. About the same time the work on the right of the ravine, with four guns, was taken, principally by the Second Vermont regiment, and the brigade swarmed over the breastworks in a tumultuous mass—men of each regiment afterwards claiming and honestly believing that they were the first to mount the works—and opened the way for the rest of the corps.

The sounds and the sights of this splendid charge, as they appeared from the rear, are thus described in a paper read before the Massachusetts Military Historical Society by Captain Hazard Stevens, who was on General Getty's staff at the time: "Dr. S. J. Allen, surgeon of the Fourth Vermont and medical director of General Getty's division, was in Fort Welch, where he had established his hospital just before the attack. He related to my not long afterwards that he was standing on the parapet when the advance was ordered, and was anxiously peering into the darkness and awaiting the result. He could hear the muffled tramp and rustle of the moving host, but could discover nothing. He saw the flashes of the first volley; he heard the mighty shout of 10,000 throats, and then he saw stretching across the front for half a mile, a line of flashing fires, crackling, blazing and sparkling in the darkness, more vividly lighted up by the heavier flashes of artillery, while shells, with their fiery trails, sped forward through the gloom in every direction. Though bullets went hissing past, he could not leave; but stood intently watching that line of deadly fire. Suddenly in the middle of it there appeared a tiny black spot, a narrow gap, which spread and widened, moment by moment, to the right and left; and then he knew the works were carried, even before the exultant cheers of our troops proclaimed the fact."

Forgetting the orders to halt and re-form, the Vermonters, everywhere still leading the advance, pushed after the flying Confederates, the foremost firing upon such as did

not surrender, and all cheering in uncontrollable excitement. The brigade thus pressed forward to the crest beyond the captured works, where by the active exertions of its officers the men were halted for an effort to restore the formation, which had become almost wholly lost. The other brigades followed, and Getty's division was partially re-formed near the Boydton Plank road, extending over towards the Cox road, and facing southwest, with the Vermont brigade on the left, Hyde's next and Warner's on the right. Skirmishers of the Third division filled the interval between the Vermont brigade and the works, and two brigades of the Third division were moving up to the right of Warner, when, before the division line was fairly formed, it moved forward. The enemy reversed his batteries in the various redans along the line, and fired grape and canister; but his troops could not be held and fled from the works as the line moved on, some running down the line of works, the Vermonters and skirmishers following them with rapid musketry firing; others scattering into the woods and open country in the rear of the works, while large numbers were enveloped in the movement of the division and surrendered. Of the part of the brigade in this movement, Major Barber says:

"The organization obtained here was very incomplete, owing to the eagerness of the troops to pursue the enemy, who were making for the woods in the rear, but with such organization as it had, the brigade, turning to the left, moved forward about half a mile and halted at the edge of a dense wood to re-form. The brigade was here formed in single line in numerical order from right to left, the Eleventh connecting with the Third division, and about half a mile distant from and inside of the enemy's works. The lines being formed, the whole command pushed forward vigorously through the thickets, swamps and pine woods, soon losing all organization again in the eagerness of the men to surpass each other in the pursuit of the enemy, who were being pursued so closely

that they could scarcely fire a shot, and appeared to have given up all idea of resistance and were only desirous to be taken prisoners. In this manner the pursuit continued for about four miles in a direction nearly parallel with the works, until Bailey's house, near Hatcher's Run, was reached, where the brigade was halted for a few minutes and then moved to the left and formed in column of regiments just inside the works.

"Words are inadequate to express the conduct of the troops in this second charge. Every man appeared to consider himself a host, and singly or in squads of three or four they charged upon whatever obstructions came in their paths. Bvt. Major E. Wales of the Second Vermont, with two men, captured a piece of artillery, turned it upon the enemy, and the shell with which the piece was charged went howling through the woods after the very men who had prepared the compliment for us. Major Sperry of the Sixth Vermont, and Lieut. Bailey of the Eleventh Vermont, assisted by a few men, captured two pieces and turned them upon the flying rebels. Being unable to procure primers the pieces were discharged by firing a musket into the vent of the piece. In this manner twelve rounds were fired, when a section of artillery coming up the guns were turned over to its commander. Captain Tilden of the Eleventh Vermont, with about a dozen men, captured two pieces of artillery, 11 commissioned officers and 62 enlisted men of the Forty-second Mississippi regiment. Sergeant Lester G. Hack, company F, Fifth Vermont, dashed into a squad of rebels, who had gathered around a beautiful stand of colors, and, with a humanity as praiseworthy as his daring, knocked down the color bearer, seized the colors as he fell, and rushed on to another portion of the field. Corporal Charles H. Dolloff, Company K, Eleventh Vermont, also captured a battle flag, supposed to be that of the Forty-second Mississippi."

Soon after the halt of the brigade, and of Getty's division,

the other two divisions came up; and as nothing more was to be gained by a further movement to the southwest, at about nine o'clock A. M., the Sixth Corps, after the troops had been permitted to rest for a few minutes, was faced about and moved toward Petersburg, in parallel columns. It had passed the "Red House," in the rear of the spot where the First Vermont Brigade broke through the lines at daybreak, when General Wright found that a strong Confederate force, of Wilcox's division, was preparing to attempt to retake the captured works. One of these had been re-occupied by the enemy, and he was pressing upon the troops—a brigade of Wheaton's division of the Sixth Corps—left to guard the others, while another body of the enemy, since understood to have been accompanied by General Lee in person, was taking position near the junction of the Cox and Boydton roads. The corps was at once deployed, and, supported by the Twenty-fourth corps, which had marched through the captured lines below and come up on its right, advanced again. General Getty was one of the first to get his division into line, and perceiving the enemy forming in front of him, and posting artillery on the Cox road, he ordered his division forward without waiting for Wheaton, who was to join him on his left. The enemy, thus threatened, withdrew in haste, one battery, near the Turnbull house, remaining and keeping up a vigorous fire of grape and canister, till it was too late to escape, and the guns were taken by troops of the Vermont brigade.⁸ Major Barber thus describes the movement and action of the brigade, in this advance:

"About nine o'clock A. M., the brigade was again put in

⁸ This is understood to have been the Charlotte, (N. C.) artillery, Captain A. B. Williams, of Lee's artillery reserve. It is related in some of the reports that General Lee was one of the last to leave the guns; and that he ordered the officer in command of the battery to say and die at his post. A wounded officer was found lying near the still smoking pieces when they were taken.

motion and moved back along the line of works, past the point at which the lines were penetrated in the morning, and formed about three miles south of Petersburg, on the left of a road leading to the city, the spires of which were plainly visible in the distance. The ground between this formation and the city consisted of a series of hills and marshy ravines, and the enemy were distinctly seen making every disposition of their troops and artillery to contest our advance. The brigade was formed in single line from right to left as follows, Eleventh, Second, Third, Fifth, Sixth, Fourth; a skirmish line was advanced under Captain Safford of the Eleventh, and the command then moved forward, its right resting on the road. The enemy poured in a very heavy fire of shot and shell from a battery on our right, which completely enfiladed our lines, and a perfect hailstorm of canister from a battery of four guns planted in the garden of the Turnbull house, where General Lee had his headquarters, directly in front.⁹ Brevet Colonel Floyd, commanding the Third Vermont, threw forward a few men as skirmishers, with orders to advance on the double quick and shoot the horses of the battery to prevent its being removed. This daring feat was accomplished with perfect success, the brigade in the meantime wheeling to the left and rapidly closing in upon the guns. The commander of the battery, finding it impossible to escape with his guns, raised a white flag, when Colonel Floyd ordered the firing to cease and pressed forward to receive his surrender. At the same time Captain R. Templeton of the Eleventh Vermont with a small squad of men came up gallantly from the right flank on the double quick to contest with Colonel Floyd the capture of the guns. Just at this moment the skirmish line of the First brigade of this division coming up on the left, and not observing the white flag, opened fire on

⁹ This was a comfortable mansion called "Edge Hill" by its owner, Mr. Turnbull. It was burned that afternoon, soon after General Lee and his staff left it.

the battery, when the men turned and fled. The guns were immediately taken possession of and a guard from the brigade established over them.¹⁰

"This was the last stand made by the enemy outside of the line of defences immediately surrounding Petersburg. The command moved forward to the bank of Heroic Creek¹¹ (about a mile outside of the suburbs of the city) under an enfilading fire from the batteries on either hand and a desultory fire of sharpshooters posted in the inner defences. A few of the sharpshooters of the Fourth Vermont, who were on the extreme left of the brigade, crossed the creek on a fallen tree, crept up the precipitous bank on the opposite side, and soon silenced the battery on the left.

"The men being now worn out by want of sleep, having eaten nothing since the night previous, and completely exhausted by the labors of this long day, were withdrawn to a ravine to the right of the road; and the brigade reformed and moved again to the left of the Nottingham house, where it threw up intrenchments and went into camp for the night."

It is impossible in regard to transactions of such a character as these, carried on with great rapidity over an extended field, and often with a great intermingling of commands, to describe in full detail the movements and exploits of the different regiments. The men could not be restrained by orders. They were continually pushing out from the lines to make captures or pursue scattered bodies of the enemy. Captain Stevens relates that in collecting the troops of the division, during the first halt after breaking through the works, he found about fifty men of the Fourth Vermont, with its colors, near the Southside Railroad, about two miles beyond the captured works, engaged, in great glee, in demolish-

¹⁰ This guard was placed by Colonel Floyd and Major Barber.

¹¹ This is the stream called Indian-Town Creek upon the government and other maps.

ing and burning a rebel wagon train. Others went still farther and tore up a portion of the track of the South Side road. Others went in other directions and in the excitement of the day and eagerness of pursuit, they left large numbers of prisoners, some guns, and quantities of arms and military stores, surrendered to them, to be gathered up and finally reported as captured by other troops. The captures of the brigade, as officially reported, included "two battle flags, nineteen pieces of artillery, horses, mules, harnesses and equipments, great quantities of quartermasters' and medical stores, and several hundred prisoners."¹²

Prominent among the incidents of the day is the gallant action of Captain Charles G. Gould of the Fifth Vermont, already mentioned. The historian deems himself in being able to present, for the first time, to the public, Captain Gould's account of this incident. Prefacing this with a brief statement of the position of his regiment, in the charge upon the enemy's works, and an allusion to the order to "bear to the left," Captain Gould says:

"My company, being the ninth in the line, was next to the left company in the regimental formation. The result of the following the order heard was, that, without being aware of it, those of us who moved out of the ravine separated from the rest of the command. Upon discovering our position a call was made for the officers present, which was responded to by my first lieutenant, Robert Pratt. We found but a handful of men with us, among whom were First Sergeants Edward Brownlee of my company—who was killed a few minutes later—and James Grace of Company B. Our position was extremely perilous. We were apparently in front of the troops supporting the brigade on its left, who would soon

¹² Thirty-one guns, 9 battle-flags and 2,100 prisoners are claimed to have been captured during the day by Getty's division. Captain R. H. Start, Third Vermont battery, who was placed in charge of ordnance captured by the Sixth Corps, turned in 20 rebel guns to the ordnance depot.

be upon us and would be unable to distinguish friend from foe in the darkness; were directly in front of and had almost reached the enemy's works, and were receiving a murderous fire. What was to be done must be done quickly. The experienced veterans of the old brigade, however, scarcely needed officers or orders in any emergency. Some one suggested, "Capture that battery." The suggestion was all that was required by them, and was followed by a dash for the work in our front, and in a moment we were making our way through the abatis. By chance I gained the abatis at a weak point, and had no difficulty in passing through it, being followed by Sergeant Brownlee, I think, and possibly by others. Most of the men, however, struck a narrow opening that had been left in the abatis, through which a path led to the enemy's front, and being compelled to file through it were necessarily somewhat delayed in reaching the work behind the abatis. Unaware of this, I had jumped into the ditch and climbed the parapet, which was scarcely reached when Sergeant Jackson Sargent, Company D, of the Fifth, appeared upon the works with one stand of our colors—the States colors I think. My appearance upon the parapet was met with a leveled musket, which fortunately missed fire. I immediately jumped into the work, and my part in the engagement was soon over. I was scarcely inside before a bayonet was thrust through my face and a sword-thrust returned for it that fully repaid the wound given me, as I was subsequently informed that it killed my assailant. At almost the same breath an officer—or some one armed with a sword—gave me a severe cut in the head. The remainder of my brief stay in the work was a confused scramble, from which, had my assailants been fewer in number, I should scarcely have escaped. As it was, firing on their part would have been dangerous for their own men; consequently their efforts were apparently restricted to the use of bayonets and clubbed muskets. During the struggle I was once seized and my

overcoat partially pulled off, and probably at this time another bayonet wound was given me in the back, as the bayonet passed through my inner coat between the shoulders, while my overcoat remained intact. This was the most severe wound of the three, the bayonet entering the spine and penetrating it nearly to the spinal cord. I have no distinct recollection of what followed, until I found myself at the parapet, trying to climb out of the work, but unable to do so. At this time Private Henry H. Record, Company A, Fifth Vermont, appeared upon the parapet at that point. The brave fellow recognized the situation, and notwithstanding the danger incurred in doing so, pulled me upon the parapet, receiving a gunshot wound himself while saving me.

"This terminated my part in the assault upon the lines at Petersburg. I must have been assisted out of the ditch without being recognized, as those with me were not aware of my escape, and I made my way to the rear as far as my remaining strength would carry me. Some of this journey is a blank to me. I remember that I did not understand what had become of the rest of my comrades who attacked the battery with me, and that I thought they had been captured and the colors with them. On my way back I met an advancing line of our own troops, told them what had happened, and begged them to hasten and recapture the supposed prisoners and flag, telling them that it was the first flag the State had ever lost. I also remember meeting Major H. C. Baxter of the brigade staff, and asking him to send some one to the rear with me.

"My statement, thus far, has been necessarily in regard to myself. It is but justice to an officer who was as brave as modest, that I should complete the history of that early morning engagement at the earthwork mentioned, as it was subsequently narrated to me by participants in the affair. It was reported to Lieutenant Pratt that I had been killed inside the works. Forming the men in the ditch, he led

them into the work and after a short but desperate fight captured the guns and a number of prisoners, and held the work until other troops arrived; but in the excitement of battle and his anxiety to rejoin his command, left guns and prisoners to the first comers, and omitting to place guards upon or take receipts for his captures, did not receive the credit to which he was entitled. I also wish to express my belief upon one other point. As stated in Major Barber's report, the honor of first placing the colors upon the works was claimed by three different regiments. It was officially reported and so far as I am aware has never been questioned, that I was the first one to enter the enemy's works. Although it can justly be attributed to chance more than any other cause, I have always believed the report to be true, and from all the circumstance connected with the engagement feel warranted in my belief. I know absolutely and positively that before leaping into the works Sergeant Jackson Sargent joined me on the parapet with one of the stands of colors belonging to the Fifth Vermont regiment, and I therefore feel justified in asserting that the colors of the Fifth Vermont were first on the works. I do not make this assertion with any desire to detract from the honor due any regiment of the brigade, or through partiality to the Fifth regiment. One of the other regiments claiming the same honor was the regiment in which I first enlisted,¹³ and in which most of my three years of service was passed—a regiment that was acknowledged to be the peer of the regiments originally composing the Old Vermont brigade."

It can be said of Captain Gould, as he says of his brother officer, with a little change of phrase, that he is as modest as he was brave. He is not the man to claim anything not justly his due, and his assertion that the colors of the Fifth Vermont were the first planted on the works—a statement which

¹³ The Eleventh Vermont.

detracts nothing from the credit due to men of other organizations who had farther to go before reaching the intrenchments—is likely to stand as the final truth upon the subject.

The portion of Major Barber's report, alluded to by Captain Gould above, is as follows: "The commanders of the Fifth, Sixth and Eleventh regiments each claim that the colors of his command was the first planted on the works; but owing to the darkness prevailing at the time the lines were reached, and the distance between the points at which their colors were placed on the works, it is impossible to decide the delicate question." Major Barber, however, subsequently decided it to his own satisfaction, and under date of June 8th, 1882, writes: "Captain C. G. Gould, Fifth Vermont, was, I am sure, the first man who entered the enemy's lines that morning." This is further confirmed by General L. A. Grant, who says; "Captain Charles G. Gould, formerly from the Eleventh regiment, was the first man over the rebel works, and as he went over he received a bayonet wound, entering his mouth and passing outside of his teeth, under his lip, and coming out near his neck."

The somewhat remarkable circumstance, mentioned in the official reports, that Lieut. Colonel Mundee, of General Getty's staff, acted for a time, this day, as commander of the Vermont brigade,¹⁴ requires explanation. Lieut. Colonel Mundee was not placed in command of the Vermont brigade by General Getty or any superior officer. The brigade was commanded at the time by its senior field officer, a brave and experienced officer, who had distinguished himself in the previous operations,¹⁵ and it would have been a very singular

¹⁴ The brigade is even alluded to as "Mundee's Vermont brigade" in some of the reports.

¹⁵ "Lieut. Colonel Tracy of the Second Vermont led the assault on the enemy's works, with a gallantry that was worthy of the troops under his command. Too much praise cannot be awarded to this gallant officer for the manner in which he handled the command in that most trying of all movements—the first shock of a desperate battle."—Major Barber's report.

performance if the division commander had superceded him, while engaged in the active performance of his duties, by a member of his staff. The facts are that Colonel Munde was sent by General Getty to guide the brigade, and that being at the time under great mental and physical excitement, Munde assumed command, informing Colonel Tracy that he was directed to do so by General Getty. As his statement was positive, and it was no time for a controversy over a question of authority, Colonel Tracy relinquished the command to Munde for a time, till, later in the day, he discovered that the self-appointed brigadier, overcome not by the rebels but by his private enemy, whiskey, had laid down the command as suddenly as he assumed it. For the statement that he never was placed in command of the brigade, General Getty will be considered sufficient authority. In reply to an inquiry from the author if this history, General Getty says: "Colonel Munde was not placed in command of the brigade, nor assigned by me to the command on that occasion; but was directed to head the brigade, then advancing, under fire, in the direction of Petersburg. Colonel Munde was there in the capacity of staff officer only, to direct the brigade under my personal orders and instructions, as commanding general of the Second division of the Sixth Corps, of which the Vermont brigade formed part. At no time during the advance was he out of my sight or hearing." Colonel Tracy command the brigade during the latter part of the day. At nightfall, or soon after, General Grant, having recovered in a measure from the effects of his injury, resumed command of the brigade.

The brilliancy and importance of the service rendered by the Vermont brigade on the 2d of April, 1865, was such, that it is not surprising that there have been other claimants for the honor which justly belongs to them. This, it is to be remem-

bered, was the last day of severe fighting during the war. The piercing of Lee's lines by the Sixth Corps was the blow which decided the immediate flight of his army.¹⁶ It has been called "the blow under which the confederacy, already tottering to its fall, crumbled." To have had a leading and decisive part in it, was a glory which any troops might envy. Of course no one claims that the Sixth Corps did all the fighting. The Ninth corps, Parke, attacked the rebel works on the right, in the early morning. On the left, several hours later, Humphreys, with the Second corps, successfully carried the intrenchments at two points on Hatcher's run. Gen. Miles, of the Second corps, overtook, attacked and routed four brigades of Hill's corps near the South Side railroad. The cavalry were engaged still farther to the left. Gen. Gibbon stormed Fort Gregg, in the enemy's second line of works. But it is to be noted that Gen. Parke, after carrying the out line of entrenchments, was repulsed from the second line with serious loss, and that he made no headway thereafter during the day. The other successes mentioned were sequels of the success of the Sixth Corps and would not have been attempted if the latter had failed. The achievement of the Sixth Corps is distinctly claimed as the grand decisive success of the day, by Gen. Wright,¹⁷ and the official reports of General Meade and Lieut. General

¹⁶ "When the Confederate intrenchments were carried by the Sixth Corps, on the morning of the 2d, General Lee at once notified Mr. Jefferson Davis that he would be compelled to abandon his lines during the following night."—General A. A. Humphreys.

¹⁷ "To the Sixth Corps had fallen the opportunity of striking the decisive blows not only at Petersburg on the 2d of April, but at the Sailor's Creek on the 6th, and most gallantly did it vindicate the confidence reposed in it by its own officers and by the commander of the Army of the Potomac. The corps had fought well; but never better than in the assault at Petersburg."—General Wright.

Grant,¹⁸ and the accounts given by General Humphreys and other historians fully sustain the claim. General Meade, commanding the Army of the Potomac, in a speech to the Sixth Corps, on the 17th of April, 1865, on the occasion of delivering to him the Confederate flags captured by the corps at Petersburg, said: "I do not wish to make any invidious distinctions between your own and the other corps of this army, but candor compels me to say that in my opinion the decisive movement of this campaign, which resulted in the capture of the Army of Northern Virginia, was the gallant and successfully charge of the Sixth Corps on the morning of the 2d of April. IT was with much pleasure I received a telegraphic dispatch from your brave commander on the previous evening, telling me his confidence in your gallantry and courage was so great that he felt confident of his ability to break through the enemy's lines. And it was with still greater satisfaction that a few hours afterwards I had the pleasure of transmitting a dispatch to the General-in-chief, telling him that the reliance of your commander had been fully borne out. To you, brave men, I return the tanks of the country and of the army."

It is needless to quote further testimony. But Getty's division led the assault of the Sixth Corps, and the Vermont brigade as undeniably led the assault of Getty's division. As this honor has been claimed by other troops, it is well to note the language of General Getty's report. He says: "The command * * * was massed in columns of regiments, each brigade forming a column, immediately in rear of the intrenched picket line captured from the enemy on the 25th of March and since held by our pickets. From this point, directly in front of Fort Welch, a ravine led straight up to the enemy's works, a distance of six hun-

¹⁸ "General Wright penetrated the lines with his whole corps, sweeping everything before him and to his left towards Hatcher's Run, capturing many guns, and several thousand prisoners."—General U. S. Grant.

dred yards. The ground, gently ascending, was partly open, and partly obstructed by stumps and branches of trees. Grant's Vermont brigade (the Second) rested is left on this ravine and was made the directing column. Hyde's brigade (the Third) was placed in the centre and Warner's (the First) on the right. The First division was en echelon in support on the right of my division, and the Third in similar order on the left." * * * It is impossible to determine to whom is due the honor of first entering the works, or what regiment first planted its flag upon them; but that this honor is due to the troops and colors of the Second division there can be no doubt. The position of the division in front of the corps, having the shortest line to the enemy's works, and carrying those works in the first charge without repulse, renders it physically impossible that it should be otherwise."

To the copy of his report from which these words are quoted General Getty has appended, for the purposes of this history, the following certificate:

"I hereby certify that the foregoing is a correct extract from my report of the operations of the Second division, sixth corps, in front of Petersburg on the 2d of April, 1865; and, further, that my attention was called to the weakness of the enemy's line of works, so gallantly carried by the division on the 2d of April, 1865, and to the character of the ground in front of said line, by Bvt. Majr0General L. A. Grant, U. S. Vols., then in command of the Second (Vermont) brigade of the division, a day or two after the affair of March 25th, 1865. General Grant reported to me, at that time, that he had carefully reconnoitred the line of works referred to, and the ground in the vicinity, and was of opinion that the works could be carried by vigorous assault.

GEO. W. GETTY, Bvt. Maj. Gen'l, U. S. A.

Late in command of Second division, Sixth Corps.

Wheaton, Md., February 24th, 1885.

General Getty did not care to sit in judgment upon the rival claims of gallant organizations of his command; but it will be seen that the argument by which he demonstrates that his division must from the nature of the case have been the first to pierce the enemy's works, supports

with equal force the claim of the Vermont brigade. In support of that, too, it can be said: its position in front of the division, having the shortest line to the enemy's works and carrying these works at the first charge without repulse, renders it physically impossible that any other troops could have preceded it in mounting the opposing parapets. Nothing is assumed, without supporting authority, in stating the premises of this argument. The point of attack was first pointed out by the commander of the Vermont brigade. His brigade moved first to the ground selected by him for the formation of the attacking column. The other brigades took position after his, and farther from the point where the enemy's lines were pierced. The appearance of a small gap in the lines, as observed by Surgeon Allen, opening suddenly and widening just before the cheers of the men announced their success, shows that the works were penetrated at one spot before they were carried at other points. The Vermont brigade started first; and it was not outstripped in the charge. General L. A. Grant's statement on these points will probably be accepted as competent and truthful. He says: "There were troops that formed on my right and left and rear, but not in line with us. The Vermont brigade was the leading brigade. The others were not to advance till we did. I was not directed where to form my brigade. I was to move out and take the position of my own selection, and the other commands were to move out after me and form on me. I had selected my exact position the day before, when it was light, and took it as near as I could in the darkness. It was selected with the view of getting at the nearest and most available position to reach the opening of the enemy's works in the ravine. I let my left rest on the ravine instead of taking position in the ravine because the ground at the right of the ravine was better to pass over—the ravine was full of stumps—and because the opening in the enemy's abatis was at our right of the ravine.

The brigade struck the point intended, and it was first in the enemy's works."

This clear and positive statement matches other well authenticated facts; and though the honor of first piercing the lines of Petersburg had been claimed by many others, including troops which passed, hours after, with arms at right should shift, through the opening made by the Vermonters, and gathered up many spoils of their fight, it belongs to and is going to stay with the Vermont brigade.

It has been asserted by Confederate historians that Lee's lines were so thinly manned that they were carried without serious resistance. The troops of the Sixth Corps were not, however, of that opinion. The corps lost 1,100 men killed and wounded in its charge. And as the Sixth Corps alone took 3,000 prisoners before ten o'clock A. M., it is plain that the works they captured were not stripped of men. "The whole captures," telegraphed Grant to President Lincoln at four o'clock P. M. that day, "since the army started out gunning, will not amount to less than 12,000 men and probably 50 pieces of artillery."¹⁹

Lee's losses in killed and wounded that day were not reported; but they were very heavy; and among them was that of one of his ablest lieutenants, General A. P. Hill, who was killed in the morning by one of the skirmishers of the Sixth Corps, near the Boydton Plank road, back of the spot where Getty broke through his lines, while he was riding from General Lee's headquarters, accompanied only by a single orderly, in search of his scattered command.

At nightfall all of the enemy west of the point where the Sixth Corps broke in had been captured or driven beyond the Appomattox and all to the East forced into Petersburg, from which city Lee could now only escape by the country roads

¹⁹ To which Mr. Lincoln replied: "Allow me to tender to you, and all with you, the nation's grateful thanks for the additional and magnificent success."

north of the river. His retreat was already in full preparation and progress, the final order for it having been given at 3 o'clock P. M. Jefferson Davis and his cabinet fled from Richmond, by a special train, to Danville, that afternoon.

The headquarters of the Vermont brigade were established for the night at Edge Hill, where Lee's headquarters had been that morning; and details from its regiments picketed the extreme left and extreme front of the Union lines. It was a body of hungry, weary and exulting men, that bivouacked that night near the powder mill, between the river road and the Appomattox, inside of all but the innermost defences of Petersburg. They had carried three miles of what have been called "the strongest lines known in modern war."²⁰ They had been under arms for eighteen hours—hours of intense effort and excitement. They were too weary to do more, nor was more needed; for it was probably better that Lee's army should be captured in its flight, than to be taken in his works with the additional loss of life that would have followed further assault upon his fortifications.

Other Vermont troops, of the Tenth and Seventeenth regiments and Third Battery, had also honorable parts in the action of the Sixth and Ninth corps on that glorious day; which will be related on other pages of this history.

The loss of the Brigade on the 2d of April, 1865, was 186 killed and wounded; as follows:

	Killed.	Wounded	Total.	Died of Wounds.
Second Vermont	7	33	40	1
Third	4	19	23	2
Fourth	1	11	12	1
Fifth	6	34	40	2
Sixth	2	19	21	1
Eleventh	5	45	50	1
	25	161	186	8

Seven men of the Fifth Vermont, taken prisoners in the

²⁰ General Badeau.

first onset, were reported missing; but were all recaptured. Among the killed were Captain Morey of the Second, killed by a canister shot from the rebel battery at the Turnbull House, and Lieutenant French of the Eleventh, shot in the first charge on the works. Among the wounded were Captain Ballou of the Second; Lieutenant Hawkins of the Third; ?Lieutenants Humphrey and Tilson of the Fourth; Captain Raymond and Lieutenant Gleason of the Fifth; and Lieutenants Thomas, Dickinson and Macomber of the Eleventh.

The four years' drama of the civil war was now fast hurrying to its close. The scenes accompanying the evacuation of Richmond that night, and its occupation by the troops of the Union next morning, need not be described here; but it may be noted that a skirmish line of hone hundred and twenty Vermonters, of the Ninth Vermont regiment, preceding the advance of General Weitzel's column, were the first Federal infantry to enter the blazing streets of the confederate capital—and that a Vermonter, Bvt. Brig. General Edward H. Ripley, was placed in command of the body of Federal troops, to which was committed the duty of establishing and preserving order in the abandoned and well nigh destroyed seat of the Confederate government.

The inner lines of Petersburg were found empty of defenders, when the Union skirmishers advanced at daybreak of April 3d. During that day and the next, Lee was concentrating his army—still numbering between thirty and forty thousand men, though rapidly dwindling by the departure of despairing confederates who started for their homes without waiting for formal discharges—at Amelia Court House, thirty miles West of Petersburg.²¹ His plan was to

²¹ The colored population of the region fully understood the situation and were as jubilant as the white population were depressed. "Where are the rebels?" asked General Sheridan, of a colored patriarch, leaning on a fence, and doing uncouth homage with a tattered hat, as the head of the Union column passed by, on its way to Jetersville. "Siftin' souf, sah. Siftin' souf," was the reply, accompanied by a smile and wave of the hand.

make his way to Danville, and Grant and Meade and Sheridan were doing their utmost to intercept him.

The Vermont Brigade started early on the morning of the 3d of April, with the sixth corps, following closely the Fifth corps, with which and the cavalry Sheridan was pushing with all possible speed to the West, to head off the Confederate army along the line of the Danville railroad. The corps marched by the Namozine or river road, south of the Appomattox, the second division in advance. The mud was deep, and there were delays in waiting for other troops to get out of the way, and the marching was hard when the columns were in motion; but the thought that they were pursuing a beaten enemy and were winding up the war, animated every soldier, and there was no straggling.

The division made fourteen miles that day, bivouacked at night on Whipponock Creek. Next day it marched twelve miles, nearly to Deep Creek. Here General Wright found himself without rations, and his corps was supplied from the Fifth corps train. Next day, the 5th, the division covered sixteen miles, and at six o'clock in the evening, went into position, with the corps, on the right of the Fifth corps, at Jetersville Station, facing northeast towards Amelia Court House, where Lee lay, five miles away.

Next morning at six o'clock, a general advance of the Second, Fifth and Sixth Corps was made toward Amelia Court House in the hope that Lee would accept battle. The lines, advancing by the right of regiments, moved to the north for three miles, when it was found that there was nothing in front of them to fight. Finding his road to Danville blocked, Lee had, the night before, moved from Amelia, hoping to slip by the Union left, and make good his escape to the mountains. All night long he had been marching his hungry and weary troops to the west, and when

day broke his army was strung out for fifteen miles or more along the road through Deatonsville and past Sailor's Creek. General Meade at once faced his command about and followed the enemy by the parallel roads. Moving back through their camp of the night before, the Sixth Corps crossed the Danville railroad at Jetersville Station and pushed on with all possible haste toward Sailor's Creek, where Ewell and Anderson, with 10,000 men who formed the rear guard of Lee's army, had been brought to a stand by the cavalry under Custer. That dashing soldier had struck the Confederate column, taken three batteries, destroyed a train of 400 wagons, and occupying the road in front, had cut Ewell and Anderson off from the main body. Ewell was preparing to attack the cavalry division which thus blocked his way, when the First and Third divisions of the Sixth Corps arrived on the ground, and a combined assault of the Union cavalry and infantry, on flank and rear, resulted before nightfall in the surrender of Ewell's corps entire, including Generals Ewell, Kershaw and Custis Lee, and the capture of about half of Anderson's corps, including the larger part of Pickett's division. Getty's division, being that day in the rear of the other two divisions, did not actively participate in the fight. It was hurried forward at double quick, to the support of the other divisions, and formed in line on the ground; but the other troops had made short work with their dispirited opponents. The Vermonters of the Old brigade thus lost the opportunity to take active part in the capture of the divisions of Anderson, Kershaw and Pickett, against which the Vermont troops had been pitted on so many hard-fought fields.

The corps crossed Sailor's Creek that evening, in pursuit of Lee, Getty's division leading the column, and advanced for two miles, till at dusk the Second Vermont regiment which was deployed in front as skirmishers, came upon Mahone's division, stationed by General Longstreet to cover the retreat of the rest. The Second skirmished through

a piece of woods to the bank of the Western Fork of Sailor's Creek. The enemy opened fire sharply from the opposite bank, and it was returned by the skirmishers of the Second with such effect as to silence the opposing fire, and the Second picketed its side of the stream till morning. There were no casualties among the Vermonters. The enemy had several wounded, among them being, it was said, an officer of General Lee's staff. This skirmish of April 6th, was the last collision of the Sixth Corps with the enemy; and the last volley fired by any portion of the corps, appears to have been fired by the men of the Second Vermont.

Next morning the division pushed on, reached the Appomattox at Farmville, after a march of fourteen miles, and crossing the river on a ponton bridge, Lee having burned the bridges, bivouacked on the northern shore. General U. S. Grant had his headquarters at the Farmville hotel, and from that shabby country inn sent to General Lee that evening, the first letter of the final correspondence between the commanding generals of the two armies, inviting Lee to surrender in order to save further effusion of blood. The little town was filled with cavalry, infantry and artillery, rebel prisoners, wagon trains, and ambulances filled with wounded. Campfires burned in the streets and in the surrounding camps, and the frightened inhabitants peered from their windows to watch the column of the Sixth Corps, moving through, and on across the river, during almost all the night. Next day the Vermont brigade was detached from the corps and sent back to Farmville, to guard the supply trains, which were soon to arrive with two days' rations for the army. It remained there that day and the next, during which Sheridan had again placed himself across Lee's only line of retreat, and Humphreys, Wright and Ord were completing the circle around what was left of the doomed Army of Northern Virginia.

During the next afternoon, April 9th, General Lee and 28,355 officers and men of his army gave their paroles not to

take up arms against the government of the United States, and that night the men of the two armies which had been in such close hostile contact for eleven months along the lines of Petersburg, mingled in friendly intercourse around their camp-fires, the victors sharing their rations with the vanquished.

The men of the Vermont brigade, being engaged in the discharge of their duty at another point, were not present at the actual surrender. Under orders to rejoin the Sixth Corps, the brigade left Farmville on the morning of the 10th, and had marched half way to Appomattox Court House, when General L. A. Grant received word that Lee had surrendered, and that the corps was moving back, and the brigade halted and bivouacked for the night. Next day it moved back to Burksville Junction, where the corps was concentrated. It remained there for twelve days, while the negotiations between General Sherman and General Johnston were in progress, for the surrender of the army of the latter, then near Raleigh, N. C. The seat of what remained of the Confederate Government was at that time on a railroad side-track at Greensboro, N. C., in a freight car, which was also the residence of Jefferson Davis for the time. On the 15th the news of the assassination of President Lincoln was received, with indescribable grief and indignation. The men of the Vermont brigade, especially, knew that they had attracted his interest and stood second to no brigade in the army in his confidence, and they mourned for him with a deep personal sorrow.

The war was now considered ended, and the troops were everywhere awaiting formal proclamation of the fact, rejoicing meantime that their days of fighting and hard marching were over. For most of the soldiers of the Union that was the case, but not for the Sixth Corps.

THE LAST MARCH TO THE SOUTH.

Suddenly, on the 23d of April, came orders to break camp and move, not to the North but to the South. The explanation of was that the negotiations between Sherman and Johnston had taken a far wider scope than those between Grant and Lee, and the terms arranged contained political provisions which the administration did not approve. General U. S. Grant was accordingly sent to Raleigh, with orders to terminate the existing armistice, and to move at once against Johnston. He started on the 22d, first ordering Sheridan to take his cavalry and a corps of infantry, and push for Greensboro with all haste, to cut off the escape of Johnston to the west. Sheridan took the Sixth Corps, of course, and on the 23d it started. It was something of a damper for the men to find that they were headed for Danville, in stead of Washington; but they obeyed orders with their accustomed alacrity. In the next four days they did some of the hardest marching of their experience, the corps making about twenty-five miles each day. "In four days and four hours," said General Wright in a congratulatory order to the corps, "not less than one hundred miles have been traveled—a march almost unprecedented in this or any other war, even under the most favorable auspices." In this march, it is needless to say, the Vermonters sustained their old reputation as marchers.

The country passed through on the route is one of the finest portions of Virginia, and it showed little of the devastation of war. Elegant residences here and there betokened the former wealth of their owners, and on many farms the farmers were at work. All had accepted the downfall of the Confederacy, and the negroes flocked around the ranks, eager to do anything for their deliverers from bondage. At two P. M. of Thursday, April 27th, the brigade and division marched through Danville, with colors flying and bands play-

ing, and camped just outside the town. Here they learned the news of Johnston's surrender, which had taken place, on the same terms as Lee's, the day before. Some of the printer boys in the First division had already taken possession of the printing office of the Danville Register and issued there from a little sheet entitled "The Sixth Corps," which did not omit to mention the fact that the corps had outmarched Sheridan's cavalry in the race to Danville.

During the month following, the Sixth Corps had the duty of guarding the railroad between Richmond and Greensboro, and was broken up into detachments for the purpose. The Vermont brigade remained at Danville, during these weeks, in which the final surrenders of the Confederate forces in Georgia, Alabama, and States west of the Mississippi, and the capture of the person of Jefferson Davis, took place. The weather was pleasant, and light guard duty the only service, and the days would have passed quickly but for the impatience of most of the men to return to their homes. But the surrender of 175, 000 armed men and at thousand cannon, and the re-establishment of Federal authority throughout the south, could not be completed in a day; and weeks lengthened into months before the army could be disbanded. In May the Army of the Potomac began moving to Washington. the troops of the Sixth Corps began to leave Danville on the 16th of May, by railroad. The Vermont brigade took cars on the 18th, and arrived next day at Manchester, just across the river from Richmond. Here the corps remained for four days, which were improved by the men in roaming through the streets of the half ruined city, and exploring Libby prison and Castle Thunder, which some of them had visited before under less cheerful auspices. Failing to obtain transportation for his corps to Washington, General Wright decided to march it thither. There was some growling among the men, that they should not be as well treated as the rebels

of Lee's army, who had been transported by the government to the points nearest to their homes; but they knew the road, and were good for the trip, and it was going home. The corps started from Richmond on the 24th of May, on its last march. This lasted ten days and was made by easy stages, averaging about a dozen miles a day. The weather was rainy and mud troublesome; but details for picket duty were now things of the past, and the nightly slumbers of the men were not disturbed by the long roll or any sound of strife. The march was made by way of Hanover Court House, Fredericksburg and Aquia Creek, and ended on the 2d of June at the spot assigned for the last camp of the Sixth Corps, between Munson's Hill and Ball's Cross roads, not far from Camp Griffin, the first camp of the brigade.

Here for a month or more longer the troops awaited their final muster out. Early in June, for the sake of bringing together all the Vermont regiment in the vicinity of Washington, the Eighth Vermont (which had been ordered to Savannah, but was recalled at the request of Governor Smith after it had embarked on the steamer which was to take it thither), the Tenth Vermont and the First Vermont cavalry were attached to the brigade. On the 7th of June, the Vermont troops were reviewed at Bailey's Cross roads, by Governor Smith of Vermont. Considerable pains had been taken by the men and their commanders to prepare for this, and it was a notable review. The troops, numbering between 4,000 and 5,000, were organized for the occasion into a division of two brigades, commanded respectively by Bvt. Brig. General George P. Foster, and Colonel John B. Mead of the Eighth, with Bvt. Maj. General L. A. Grant commanding the division. The brigade band of the Old brigade and the regimental band of the Eighth regiment furnished the music. Governor Smith was accompanied by Adjutant General P. T. Washburn, Quartermaster Gen-

eral P. P. Pitkin and Surgeon General S. W. Thayer of his staff, by Generals William Wells and J. M. Warner with their staffs, and by a number of prominent Vermonters and civil officials in Washington, many of whom were accompanied by ladies. General Washburn said of this review: "The occasion was one of deep interest—not merely as a fine military display of admirably drilled troops, executing every movement with the utmost precision, but as a review, by the Governor of the State, of the scarred, sunburned and war-worn veterans whom the State had sent into the field, intrusted with the maintenance of her honor, who had met the enemy in many a fierce and sanguinary conflict, and some of them in every battle in which the Army of the Potomac had participated, from the first Bull Run to the final surrender of Lee on the banks of the Appomattox. There were officers and men there present, whose names have been household words in Vermont for the last four years, and will stand upon the roll of honor of the State, as long as the State shall have a history. Numbering scarce 6,000 men, they were all that remained in active service of nearly 20,000, who had been sent from the State in the regiments reviewed."

At the close of the review, the Governor and attending guests were entertained by General Grant, who had spread a handsome collation for his guests in a pavilion of green boughs at his headquarters on Munson's Hill.

The Sixth Corps, having been retained on duty in Virginia after most of the troops of the Armies of the Potomac and Tennessee had been ordered to Washington, could not participate in the grand review of those armies, which took place on the 23d and 4th of May. It was, however, in due time, accorded the honor of a special review by the President of the United States. This took place in Washington on the 8th of June. In this the seven infantry regiments then com-

prised in the brigade participated. The day was one of the hottest ever known at the capital, and the parade and march back to camp made an experience more trying than the ordeal of battle. Many men staggered fainting past the reviewer's stand, and hundreds fell from exhaustion and sunstrokes; but the Vermonters stood it well though they had had a long parade of their own the day before, and they bore themselves proudly, their tattered colors wreathed with green, while each officer and man wore in his cap the Green Mountain boy's badge, the evergreen sprig. And by the accord of thousands of spectators from other States, they bore off the highest honors of the day. The New York Tribune's report of the review said: "The Vermont brigade, Maj. General L. A. Grant, were greatly admired for their final appearance. Maj. General Casey, whose praise is worth having, says their marching was of a superior order, indicating excellent discipline, and that that was the only brigade that saluted the President correctly." The correspondent of the *Boston Journal* said: "The Vermont brigade made the best display, and received the highest compliments." Other journals gave like prominence and praise to the brigade.

The Army of the Potomac, of which it has been said that "for four long years it either stood as a great wall between Washington and Richmond, or kept passing like a weaver's shuttle between the two capitals; the army which for four long years was the sword and shield of the Great Republic, and which held in its grasp not only the destinies of this land but the fate of liberty and of good government throughout the world; an army which fought over more miles of ground than most armies of the world had ever marched over"²² was now rapidly melting into the common mass of American citizens. When the order for the disbandment of the Vermont

²² General Horace Porter of New York.

brigade was received, its commander issued the following farewell address to the brigade

Headquarters Vermont Brigade,
Second division, Sixth Corps, June 24, 1865

Officers and Soldiers of the Vermont brigade:

Our battles are over, victory is ours, and Peace smiles upon our fair land. The principles of Republicanism are established. The rights of man are vindicated, and the power of the Federal Government is settled, it is hoped, for all time. Your patriotism, your severe toils, your patient endurance of hardships, and your gallant heroism have contributed largely to these glorious results. You are soon to visit the homes you have protected and the friends who have anxiously watched your career, and our official and social relations in the field are to cease. Having been connected with the brigade from its organization, and in command for more than two years, I cannot leave without a parting word.

Soldiers! For your good conduct, your noble bearing, your obedience to orders, and your unsurpassed gallantry in action, I thank you. The thanks of your State and a grateful nation are yours. Your record is a proud one. History records no braver deeds. Yet it is a record of blood, and many a well fought field is stained with the life blood of brave comrades. We mourn their loss, and while we cherish their memories, let us emulate their virtues.

Having successfully fought for the preservation of our common country, let us become good citizens, perpetuate its free and liberal institutions, and strive in all the arts of peace to make it, under the blessing of God, truly the wonder and admiration of the world.

L. A. GRANT

Brevet Major General U. S. A.

On the 19th of June 660 men of the five original regiments of the old brigade, whose three years' terms of service were to expire before October of that year, were mustered out of service, and left camp at once for home. They preserved a sort of organization, under command of Adjutant Hiram S. English of the Sixth. They arrived at Burlington on the 23d, and were received in the City Hall by the Mayor and welcomed back by Hon. Daniel Roberts, as representatives of "the fighting brigade of the fighting corps, so pronounced by those who have studied best the history of the war." This was the last public appearance of any body of men that could be called the Vermont brigade. The residues of the

regiments, with the exception of three small battalions, which remained on duty for two weeks longer, and a battalion of the Eleventh which was stationed in the forts at Washington for two months longer, were mustered out of the United States service during the last week in June; and on the 28th of June, 1865, the brigade was formally declared to be disbanded, in the general disbandment of the Sixth Corps and of the Army of the Potomac.