

Here the Reaper was the Angel of Death:
The First Maine Heavy Artillery During the Overland Campaign.

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A Thesis in the Field of History
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University
May 2001

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents who gave me the tools to succeed and to my wife Patricia who gave me the support to make it happen. This thesis is also dedicated to the memory of the men from the First Maine Heavy Artillery and the men women who have defended our freedom in the past and are doing so today, including my brother Lance Cpl. Matthew D. MacIsaac, USMC.

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Introduction

For as long as I can remember I have always been fascinated by the American Civil War and specifically interested in how the war affected the men who fought it. While the subject of the American Civil War presents many fascinating topics of discussion and investigation for historians and students alike, the aspect of the American Civil War that interests me the most is how men from many different walks of life and from many different backgrounds could find enough passion in a cause and a common purpose that they would be willing to face the prospects of mortal combat and pay the ultimate price in trying to preserve and defend that cause.

In many cases the veterans who survived the hell of combat could not adequately put into words what they had seen first hand. Many times these veterans used terms such as “seeing the elephant” or describe themselves as being in the “fog of war ” when the situation was too confusing to describe.

As James McPherson explains, the Civil War was the biggest and most fearful experience that any generation of Americans has known. More than 620,000 soldiers lost their lives during the Civil War, representing 2 percent of the population of the United States in 1861. This fact is most remarkable when one considers that if a war at the same relative magnitude as the American Civil War was fought today, and 2 percent of the population were killed, over 5 million American deaths would result.¹

¹ James McPherson, Introduction, Turned Inside Out by Frank Wilkeson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books, 1997) v.

When one looks at the American Civil War it is easy to get caught up in the debates over why the war was fought, the way it was fought, and the personalities of those who fought it. These issues are important because the American Civil War did more to shape, define, and forge American society than any other event in our history. It is, however, difficult to gain an understanding of what the war meant to the common soldier and how those who survived this “biggest and most fearful” experience came to remember and record their experience. In my opinion, how the veterans came to interpret their experience and tried to preserve it for posterity is one of the most fascinating legacies of the war. Having grown up in Maine, I am familiar with the history of Maine men who had fought in the Civil War and the exploits of such vaunted regiments as the 20th Maine at Gettysburg. Yet for all the popular stories of these heroes from Maine and their exploits there were countless other stories of men who fought in the Civil War that, although not as well known, are as every bit as heroic as they are tragic.

One such experience is that of the First Maine Heavy Artillery and the resulting legacy it left on the battlefields of Virginia. Organized originally as the 18th Maine Volunteer Infantry in the summer of 1862, the men of this regiment seemed to be blessed when instead of being sent to the front to join the Army of the Potomac to suffer through the hardships and struggles of battles such as Antietam, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg, they were detailed to garrison the forts protecting Washington, DC. In January 1863 under orders from the War Department, the designation of the 18th Maine

was changed to the First Maine Heavy Artillery.² This change in designation was due to the fact that this regiment trained in both infantry and heavy artillery tactics.

In the spring of 1864 when Union General Ulysses S. Grant launched his offensive against the Confederate Army of Robert E. Lee in hopes of ending the war once and for all, he was able to convince his superiors, General Henry Halleck, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, and President Abraham Lincoln that he needed to get all available troops into the field. For the First Maine Heavy Artillery the request meant that they would have to leave the relative comfort of garrison duty and join their comrades in the field for the final push on to Richmond.

None of the Heavy Artillery Regiments that were ordered to the front alongside the First Maine Heavy Artillery had an easy adjustment to their role as front-line soldiers. The veteran troops of the Union Army gave many of these new arrivals a hard time calling them “Band Box Soldiers” and “Old Abe’s Pets” for the time they spent in and around Washington and away from the front lines. In addition, the rigors of front-line service including sickness, fatigue, and of course the dangers posed by facing a well-trained and experienced enemy, all quickly took their toll on these newly arrived troops. The veterans of the Army of the Potomac had seen first hand what the rigors of warfare had done to their own regiments and they assured these new arrivals that even with their large size General Grant would soon cut them down to size.³

While regiments on both sides of the conflict faced and suffered from the rigors of war, no regiment seemed to suffer as badly as the First Maine Heavy Artillery. In only

³General Order December 12, 1862, First Maine Heavy Artillery Regimental Records, ms. Record Group 4 94, National Archives, Washington,

ten months of active field service, from May of 1864 to April of 1865, the First Maine Heavy Artillery earned the distinction of having suffered one of the highest percentage of battle casualties of any Union regiment during the entire war.⁴ In these short ten months the First Maine Heavy Artillery led all Union regiments with the greatest number of battle deaths with 423.

Most of the tremendous losses in the First Maine Heavy Artillery occurred within in a space of thirty days between May 19 and June 18, 1864. This period was highlighted by the losses the First Maine Heavy Artillery suffered on June 18, 1864, when the regiment was ordered to charge a strongly defended Confederate position at Petersburg, Virginia. Going into action with 900 men, in just 10 minutes, the First Maine Heavy Artillery suffered over 600 casualties, a tragic record that gave the regiment the dubious distinction of having suffered the highest number of battle casualties in a single engagement out of any Union regiment.⁵

This thesis will examine the experience of the soldiers of the First Maine Heavy Artillery through the first 30 days of their service as members of the Army of the Potomac. It will focus on the events leading up to the disastrous charge on June 18, 1864, and examine the factors surrounding how the regiment although well disciplined and well drilled was ill prepared to fight in the type of war that had emerged by the spring of 1864. This thesis will also examine how the nineteenth-century ideals of courage, bravery, and

⁵ Bruce Catton, A Stillness at Appomattox (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1954) 47.

⁶ William B. Jordan, Jr., Maine in the Civil War: A Bibliographic Guide (Portland, ME: Maine Historical Society, 1976) 67. Herein cited as Jordan, Maine in the Civil War.

⁷ The Civil War Book of Lists (Conshohocken, PA: Combined Books, 1993) 95. Herein cited as Civil

8 War Book of .

discipline exhibited by Colonel Daniel Chaplin were fundamentally at fault for the disaster that befell the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery.

The goal of this thesis is to reveal a more accurate and detailed portrayal of how the First Maine Heavy Artillery under the command of Colonel Daniel Chaplin was slaughtered because the men held ideal the nineteenth-century societal views of not fearing for their personal safety when duty and honor required that they exhibit bravery and courage. They held on to these views of what society expected from them even when faced with evidence to the contrary that bravery was no guarantor of victory, especially given the modernization of war. The history of how a single regiment could suffer through unprecedented devastation and destruction in such a short span of time deserves a more in-depth exploration, because it is not adequately explained by the previously written history of the First Maine Heavy Artillery.

Chapter 1

Out of Step with the Course of War

To a society that had grown up hearing about the heroic deeds of the American soldiers during the War for Independence and reading about romanticized images of warfare in popular books like the Waverly novels of Sir Walter Scott, the outbreak of the Civil War gave men the opportunity to prove their manliness and maintain their honor. American society in the nineteenth century valued the virtues of manliness, bravery, and courage to such a degree that these attributes were synonymous with a man's honor. When war broke out in 1861 the only honorable thing to do for most able-bodied men was to volunteer for service. The connection between volunteering to serve and proving one's honor came to be seen not only as virtue but more importantly as a sacred duty that men had to their country. Volunteering to serve, however, was only the first step in fulfilling one's duty. In volunteering, the Union soldiers were invoking the legacy of the Founding Fathers. According to Civil War historian James McPherson, the generation that faced the outbreak of war in 1861 were the inheritors to a Nation that had been built on blood and sacrifices of the heroic generation of 1776, and, as the children of the founding fathers, they were expected to defend what their fathers had built. To embrace this expectation, men from all over the North volunteered to serve.⁶

While volunteering to serve was a crucial first step, the soldiers of 1861 were also expected to constantly exhibit courage and bravery under even the most trying of times.

⁶James M. McPherson, For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 18 Herein cited as McPherson, For .

As Civil War author Gerald Linderman explains, “whatever the individual might conceive to be the object of his duty, the principle way to satisfy it was to act courageously.” In short “courage had for the Civil War soldiers a narrow rigid, and powerful meaning: heroic action undertaken without fear.” Such dedication to the beliefs in the virtues of courage, bravery, discipline, and honor gave the Civil War soldier the strength to face the prospects of receiving an “honorable” wound or dying a “soldier's death.” More importantly, however, the soldiers believed that if they stayed true to these societal ideals they could overcome even the most trying elements and be victorious on the battlefield.⁷

Despite the dangers of war, there was no shortage in eagerness by many volunteer soldiers to take part in the action or “to see the elephant.” According to McPherson this eagerness for combat especially on behalf of green recruits grew in part from their notions of manliness. In short, it was a chance for these men to prove what they were made of. This eagerness also affected officers who not only had to face up to their own manliness but also had the extra pressure of having their manhood put on trial by their ability to command. This eagerness for most Civil War soldiers was short lived however. Once a soldier became intimately familiar with the horror of war he was not as eager to face the elephant simply to test his manhood. This does not mean that the soldiers who enlisted in 1861 and 1862 were not willing to continue to fight after they had seen the elephant. To the contrary, “the belief in duty, honor and country that had caused them to enlist in the

¹¹Gerald F. Linderman, Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War

¹² (New York : Free Press, 1987) 11, 17. Herein cited as Linderman, Embattled

¹³ Courage.

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first place held them in the firing line even as eagerness for combat was replaced with the fear of impending action.⁸

As the war went on Civil War soldiers were eventually

forced to absorb the shocks of battle, to remodel combat behavior, to abandon many of the war's initial tenets, to bear discipline of an order intolerable not long before, to rationalize a warfare of destruction, and to come to terms with changes in their relationships with commanders, conscripts, and civilians, soldiers suffered a disillusionment more profound than historians have acknowledged or the soldiers themselves would concede.⁹

While Gerald Linderman cites a feeling of disillusionment that came over the soldiers as the war progressed into 1863 and 1864, James McPherson, who agrees that there was without question a decline in the romantic flag-waving rhetoric of the war's first two years, writes that the values of duty and honor remained a crucial component to the motivation of the soldiers that enabled them to see the war through to the end.

McPherson is correct to a degree, as many Civil War soldiers did remain until the end of the war including thousands who reenlisted for additional terms of service even after their original enlistment periods were over. However, although many soldiers stayed until the end of the war, others chose to leave and return home feeling that they had completed their duty. For those who stayed and continued to fight, the precepts of honor and duty were still motivating factors, but the never-ending consumption that the war brought, especially on manpower, weighed heavily on the minds of those who remained.

According to Linderman, as the number of casualties, especially in individual regiments, began to mount, men in these regiments who had survived through the battles

¹⁵McPherson, *For Cause*, 36.

¹⁶Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 240.

of 1861, 1862, and 1863 began to see combat no longer as an experience that would “purify and strengthen individual character.” Instead, combat was something that brought with it the prospects of a death penalty. As individuals, these soldiers began to realize that the longer they stayed the more vulnerable they became. This self-awareness of their own vulnerability did create a feeling of disillusionment. Although this disillusionment was there, for many soldiers it was not to the degree that they would give up on the cause. Instead the disillusionment served to make the soldiers more cautious and less likely to take unnecessary risks.

Additionally the changing technology of the war, such as the increased range and accuracy of weapons, the intensity of fire, and the use of defensive fortifications were all factors that helped to increase the sense of disillusionment that by the later stages of the war saw whole commands refuse to undertake such reckless actions as charging across an open field to assault an enemy positions.¹⁰

Many regiments in the Union Army were beyond the breaking point by the time they reached Petersburg in June of 1864. Having fought through the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, and many other engagements, some regiments refused to charge when ordered to assault the works outside of Petersburg. The Army of the Potomac was knee deep in a feeling of disillusionment, which had some soldiers claiming the Army was “utterly unnerved and demoralized.”¹¹

In the face of disillusionment, soldiers who were on the front lines from 1862 to the spring of 1864 were able to adjust to the changing nature of war. They were able to

17¹⁰Linderman, Embattled Courage, 138 - 139.

18¹¹McPherson, For Cause,

adjust their perceptions of bravery, courage, honor, and duty gradually to a point where they could coolly retreat under fire without panic or shame, quickly re-form and continue fighting, or in some cases, refuse to charge.¹² The men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery and the other Heavy Artillery that joined them did not have this experience. As a result when these regiments finally arrived upon the battlefield in May of 1864, they were vastly out of step with perceptions of what bravery, courage, and honor now meant in the face of duty.

Being out of step with the current course of the war and relatively unaffected by the disillusionment of the war, many of the Heavy Artillery Regiments that left the forts in Washington in the spring of 1864 suffered heavily during General Grant's overland campaign. Case in point was the Seventh New York Heavy Artillery. When this regiment first received orders to march to the front in May of 1864, there was "hilarious cheering." Nine months later, after seeing 291 of their comrades killed and more than 500 wounded, those who remained cheered with the same "general noisy hilariterity" when they were ordered to garrison duty towards the end of the war.¹³

The First Maine Heavy Artillery spent the first two-and-a-half years of its existence sheltered from the full fury of the war and they did not suffer this disillusionment that Linderman describes. Because the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery including Colonel Daniel Chaplin, were more in tune with the precepts and tenants of the war in its early stages, they were unwittingly unprepared to fight in what had become a modern war.

¹²Earl J. Hess, The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1997) 195 -196. Herein cited as Hess, The Union Soldier.

21¹³McPherson. For Cause,

15??

Chapter 2

An Officer to Lead Them

The role of regimental officers has always been important to the development and performance of military regiments. Since Napoleonic times the commanding officer “did more than anyone else to determine the character of his regiment and set its standard of efficiency.” The character of the First Maine Heavy Artillery and its performance under the most heavy of fire can be directly attributed the leadership of their Colonel.¹⁴

The First Maine Heavy Artillery was originally organized as the 18th Maine Infantry Regiment in the summer of 1862. The regiment consisted of approximately 1000 men and officers from the eastern part of Maine, primarily from Hancock, Penobscot, and Washington counties. The commanding officer was Daniel Chaplin, a Bangor merchant who had served with distinction as Major in the Second Maine Regiment.

When the men of the 18th Maine (later the First Maine Heavy Artillery) were first assembled in the summer of 1862, they got their first look at an embodiment of the soldierly ideals of courage bravery, discipline and honor in the person of their Colonel, Daniel Chaplin. Unlike many of his men, Daniel Chaplin was an experienced soldier. He was one of the first to answer the call the previous summer and had seen action with the Second Maine. During his term of service with the Second Maine, then Major Chaplin distinguished himself at the battle of Hanover Court House on May 27, 1862, when he personally led a small detachment of troops in a charge to recapture Union guns that had

22¹⁴Rory Muir, Tactics and the Experience of Battle in the Age of Napoleon (New
23 Haven: Yale University Press, 1998)

been overrun by Confederate forces. In the initial assault, which was unsuccessful, a Confederate minnie ball struck the scabbard of Chaplin's sword, bending it so the sword could not be drawn. After regrouping his command, Major Chaplin was presented with another sword from the battery's commander. Chaplin took the sword and used it to lead the way in another assault, which was successful in reacquiring the guns from their temporary Confederate owners.¹⁵

This action helps explain how Chaplin came to be so well respected by his men. He, as did many other officers, realized that his ability to secure obedience from his men was directly related to how well his men judged him fit and worthy to command. Most officers had to prove themselves exemplars of courage, which Chaplin had done by a conspicuous exposure to enemy fire not once but twice. If the postwar descriptions of Chaplin are to be believed then it is quite clear that his men saw him in a most favorable light and that he did project a presence upon his men that they found easy to respect and admire. A tangible expression of this admiration was the \$1000 sword that the enlisted men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery bought and presented to Daniel Chaplin in January of 1864. However, the fact that this sword was presented to Chaplin months before the First Maine Heavy Artillery left for the front lines proves they admired him before they saw him in command under combat conditions. Whether he would have received such a token of esteem after the First Maine had been decimated on June 18, 1864, it is impossible to answer.¹⁶

¹⁵ Stories of Our Soldiers: War Reminiscences, by Carleton and by Soldiers of New England (Boston: Journal Newspaper Company, 1893) 225.

¹⁶ This sword is on display at the Bangor Historical Society in Bangor,

When the 18th Maine Volunteer Infantry left Maine, instead of being assigned to the front lines, the regiment was detailed to guarding the forts in and around Washington, DC. Garrisoning the forts meant that the men of the 18th Maine had to become proficient in manning the heavy gun batteries that made Washington into an impregnable fortress.¹⁷

This time in Washington gave Chaplin the ability to exhibit and more importantly instill in his command a strong sense of duty and honor. The fact that the First Maine Heavy Artillery remained in garrison duty and did not face the rigors of the battlefield allowed this attachment to duty and honor to continue to grow within the regiment while in the rest of the army the rigors of active campaigning continually whittled away at the societal precepts of courage, bravery, discipline, honor, and duty.

James McPherson has written that the traditional means of motivating soldiers to fight are training, discipline, and leadership and that Civil War volunteer regiments were notoriously deficient in the first, weak in the second, and initially shaky in the third. In early regiments especially, the problems McPherson details were very common. Daniel Chaplin, as an officer of the 2d Maine who fought through the first battles of the war, saw first hand the effect that poor training, lax discipline, and inexperienced officers had on the performance of troops in battle. When given the chance to lead his own command, his actions indicated he would not allow his regiment to fail for any reasons that had to do with leadership, discipline, or training.¹⁸

¹⁷ Benjamin Franklin Cooling III and Walton H. Owen II, Mr. Lincoln's Forts: A Guide to the Civil War Defenses of Washington (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing, 1988).

¹⁸ McPherson, For Cause,

In December of 1862 the designation of the Eighteenth Maine was changed to the First Maine Heavy Artillery.¹⁹ The organization of the regiment was changed as well, as two new companies were added, increasing the number from ten to twelve and the size of each company was changed from 100 to 150 men, bringing the total official number of men and officers to 1800.²⁰

Because the idea of serving in the forts sat well with many potential recruits, the First Maine Heavy Artillery had little trouble staying close to full strength on its muster rolls. In fact, with the changed designation, many of the men in the First Maine Heavy Artillery wrote home telling their friends and extended family to join the regiment. Peleg Bradford, a soldier in the First Maine Heavy Artillery, wrote to his wife “tell the boys if they want to enlist to join the First Maine Artillery..., for we shant have any long marches to go on.”²¹

While in the forts, the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery “had little to do. . . but practice with their fortress artillery, drill and counter march between various forts and redoubts in the heat, curse the diarrhea, typhoid, and typhus, but if lucky catch a quick off-duty swim in either Rock Creek or the Potomac.”²² While on garrison duty the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery made themselves comfortable by building log houses and rope beds. They also had a fresh supply of milk and other things that they

²¹⁹General Order December 12, 1862, First Maine Heavy Artillery Regimental Records, ms. Record Group

³ 94, National Archives, Washington, DC.

²⁰ Earl J. Coates, “The Bloody First Maine,” Civil War Times Illustrated (2 July 1972) 36. Herein cited as Coates, “The Bloody First Maine.”

¹²¹Peleg Bradford, No Place for Little Boys, Civil War Letters of a Union Soldier, ed. Melissa MacCrae and Maureen Bradford (Brewer, ME: Goddess Publications, 1997) 24. Herein cited as Bradford, No Place.

²²²Benjamin Franklin Cooling, Symbol, Sword, and Shield, Defending: Washington During the Civil War

were able to buy from local residents. Horace Shaw pointed out that some of the younger officers took to the theory of artillery and fortifications and they spent many extra hours studying about engineering, field works, fortifications, ordnance, and artillery theory. With all this extra effort put in by the men to make themselves comfortable and by the officers to become more proficient in commanding garrison troops, it was easy for the men to fall into a false sense of security that they would never be called to the front.²³

Colonel Chaplin did not accept the idea that the First Maine Heavy Artillery would always be in the comfortable surrounding they were in at that time. Colonel Chaplin was not about to let his regiment experience the same fate of many inexperienced Union troops whose lack of discipline and military skills caused them to break and run when they faced an equally inexperienced Confederate Army at the Battle of Bull Run. To this end Chaplin and his officers drilled and trained the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery very hard.

A sergeant in the regiment recalled how Colonel Chaplin took the drilling of his regiment seriously: “Col. Daniel Chaplin, the commander of our regiment, was a military man, a veteran and an excellent Drill Master...he expected the officers to be well drilled... Battalion Drill with Colonel Chaplin... there was something new going on all the time, marching by flank, breaking into company while marching by flank, instantly changing

3 (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1975)

4²³ Horace H. Shaw and Charles J. House, The First Maine Heavy Artillery, 1862-1865: A
5 History of Its Part and Place in the War for the Union, with Organization, Company, and
6 Individual Records (Portland, 1903) 97 - 99. Herein cited as Shaw, The First Maine Heavy
7 Artillery.

into line again, forward in line of battle, etc. All of this was interesting and necessary to keep us in trim for the time when we got our call to go to the front.”²⁴

A typical day for the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery as ordered by Colonel Chaplin followed this schedule:

Reveille 5 o'clock A.M.
Breakfast 6
Surgeons Call 7
Fatigue Call 7:30
Guard Mounting 8
Drill Artillery 8
Recall from Drill 10
Recall from Fatigue 10:30
Roast Beef 12 Noon
Fatigue Call 2 o'clock P.M.
Drill Infantry 3
Recall from Drill and Fatigue 5
Retreat at Sundown - Supper 5 o'clock P.M.
Tattoo 8:30
Taps 9²⁵

During dress parades Colonel Chaplin would personally lead the entire regiment through the “Manual of Arms” and, according to one soldier, if everything went well the drill would be over, but if he commanded “order arms” and all of the gun butts did not strike the ground at the same instant, then the drill would be repeated until everything was in order. In addition to the scheduled drills and dress parades Colonel Chaplin would conduct surprise “call to arms” late at night to evaluate the readiness of his command. While all was quiet in camp the “long roll” would be played by a regimental drummer. This signified that all members of the regiment had to get out of bed or drop what they

⁸²⁴George H. Coffin, Three Years in the Army (n.p. 1925) 6 - 7. Herein cited as Coffin, Three .

⁹²⁵Regimental Order No 9, May 8, 1864. Regimental Books. First Maine Heavy Artillery, ms. Record 10 Group 94, National Archives, Washington,

were doing, get in uniform, put on their equipment, and get into line without delay. Then the 1st Sergeant would call the roll and “woe be to the poor private that could not show a good reason for his absence.” By one account the entire First Maine Heavy Artillery under the command of Daniel Chaplin became so efficient at this “surprise drill” that they could be ready and in line in about seven minutes.²⁶

When problems did arise in the regiment Colonel Chaplin and his officers were quick to discipline the offenders. Captain Whiting S. Clark of Company E wrote the following report regarding the punishment for two of his soldiers:

For using violent and abusive language to one of the company cooks, Private S. H. Brown is hereby detailed for fatigue duty from Reveille in the morning till 8 o'clock A.M. and from 5 o'clock P.M. till retreat for five days. He will answer other calls for duty between these times as usual.

For making a slanderous report about the Quarter Master Sergeant making money off the commissary stores Private Sam Sandlers will suffer the same fate as above.²⁷

The men of the regiment seemed to understand that they were expected to follow the precepts of good military order and discipline and that if they did not they expected to face consequences of some sort. One soldier wrote: “There was eleven of us out of our Company who went out on a raid the other night without asking our Captain and when we got back they gave us a knapsack drill for three hours... . When a man goes out here he has to ask the Captain, or else he will get punished, but we thought that we would go on our own hook and take what followed.”²⁸

¹¹²⁶Coffin, Three Years, 8.

¹²²⁷Report May, 2, 1864, Company E, First Maine Heavy Artillery Regimental Records, ms. Record Group

¹³ 94, National Archives, Washington, DC.

¹⁴²⁸Bradford, No Place,

During the Civil War, Union volunteer officers were in a difficult situation.


Unlike regular army officers there was no traditional division between a commander and the men he commanded. Volunteer Officers shared the same background of those they commanded, and, additionally, the democratic ideals of equality of between white men created a sense of familiarity between volunteer officers and men. Northern soldiers “did not show any particular fondness of having other soldiers in authority over” them, but if the officer respected his men then they would be willing to respect him.

Being a strong disciplinarian and paying strict attention to military order did not seem to affect Colonel Chaplin’s standing with the majority of his command. He earned the respect of his men by being fair and respecting them. The most common description of Colonel Chaplin was that he was the father of the regiment. This description according to one historian fits nicely into the ideal models of mid-nineteenth-century American society. Fitting in to the domestic background of a majority of Northern soldiers the hierarchical family relationship served as a model for the military relationships between Union volunteer officers and men. Officers were the parents and the soldiers were children. “A father may command his children but he also keeps their best interest at heart” and those officers who instinctively used this model had an a relatively easier time getting their commands to follow their orders not under threat of reprisal but rather out of respect.²⁹

The time spent in the forts guarding Washington served to deepen this relationship between Colonel Chaplin and his men. The men looked to their colonel with respect and

15²⁹ Reid Mitchell, The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 43-47. Herein cited as Reid, The Vacant Chair.

expressed a strong desire to stay under his command. As one officer explained, when the regiment was ordered to remain with the Colonel the men were pleased as “we like the Col. and we do not wish to serve” without being under his command.³⁰ It was this feeling of respect in the leadership of Colonel Chaplin that First Maine Heavy Artillery was operating under in the spring of 1864. How this feeling of respect would translate on the battlefield was still an unknown to the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, but according to one Union soldier, “when an officer has the respect of his men he can lead them in the hottest fight with a clear conscience, can depend on them to do their duty or all that is required.”³¹



17³⁰Fred Carr Howes to Mary A. Howes, February 28, 1864, Letters of Frederick Carr Howes (np, 1998) ts.

18 Edited by David Dayton Blair. Herein cited as Letters of Frederick Carr Howes.

19³¹Reid, The Vacant Chair,

Chapter 3

The Road to the Front

In the spring of 1864, General Grant received permission from the War Department to pull the heavy artillery regiments from their garrison duties and make them front-line soldiers. On May 14, 1864, the First Maine Heavy Artillery, along with several other heavy artillery regiments, was ordered to organize as a separate division under the command of Brigadier General Robert O. Tyler. Tyler's Division of Heavy Artillery was then ordered to the front to join Grant's Army of the Potomac as part of the Union Army's Second Corps under the command of Winfield Scott Hancock.

When the order to march to the front arrived one soldier in the First Maine wrote that, based on the news he had heard, the regiment would "get along first rate at the front."³² Another soldier, Private John Steward, wrote his wife a letter that depicted the uncertainty that faced the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery as they faced the reality of going to the front:

Dear Abby, we have at last got marching orders. I do not yet know our destination but I suppose to reinforce Grant's Army. Our order came this morning and we have to start at one o'clock so it is all hurry and pack up...tell the children that father would be glad to see them... If I should be taken away may God bless and take care of those I leave behind. I intend to do my duty as a soldier as far as I can.³³

These feelings were typical of most of the men First Maine Heavy Artillery. They were eager to get a crack at the enemy and help preserve the Union, but they seemed to also realize that there was some inherent danger in moving to the front.

³² Moses Stewart to Elizabeth Dore, May 15, 1864. Dore Family Letters. Ts.

One officer wrote to his wife, “we do not know which way we shall go but we are bound for Richmond. The boys are all well and glad to be on the march.”³⁴

What these men had no way of knowing, however, was how this order to the front would forever change the history of the First Maine, for up to this point the regiment had yet to fire a shot in combat or come under enemy fire. They now had to prepare to face combat and trust that their efficiency in drill and adherence to discipline would be enough to give them the advantage when they met the enemy for the first time.

In preparation for their move to the front, Colonel Chaplin was ordered to requisition Springfield Muskets for his men and his command was issued five days of rations, shelter tents halves, and 150 rounds of ammunition. He knew, as did Regimental Chaplain Henry C. Leonard, that when the First Maine Heavy Artillery left the forts in Washington the lives of those in the regiment would be much more “eventful.”³⁵

The men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery in May of 1864 were much like the men of both armies who first stood against each other in the summer of 1861 in their physical appearance and experience in combat. Unlike their predecessors, however, the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery were much better trained in the close order tactics of the day thanks to the leadership of Daniel Chaplin. It remained to be seen if the training and discipline that the regiment had undergone could overcome the rigors of the battlefield during the upcoming campaign.

1 ³³John Steward to Abby Steward, May 14, 1864. Steward Letters.

2 ³⁴Fred Carr Howes to Mary A. Howes, May 16, 1864, Letters of Frederick Carr Howes.

3 ³⁵Regimental Orders, May 13, 1864, First Maine Heavy Artillery Regimental Records, ms. Record Group

4 94, National Archives, Washington, DC. Henry C. Leonard, Gospel Banner, June 11, 1864

5 Augusta,

Nothing in their training or experience had prepared them to see the face of battle in the spring of 1864. When the First Maine Heavy Artillery arrived at the front, shortly after the bitter fighting at the Wilderness and Spotsylvania, it presented a stark contrast to the veteran regiments of the Army of the Potomac. The size of the First Maine Heavy Artillery made it larger than most brigades and their red-trimmed artillery frock coats were clean in appearance, yet these troops were green to the core when it came to military experience.³⁶

For five hours the First Maine Heavy Artillery cruised aboard transports that took the regiment down the Potomac River to Belle Plain Landing in Virginia. Upon arriving, Private Walter Gilman recalled that he was “surprised at finding a place with such an even sounding name to be so rough and hilly.” In addition to the rough terrain, the regiment had to struggle through a thick goeey mud that caused Private Gilman to further remark that the mud was so thick that he had never seen anything like it before, and had no desire to see it again. Private Gilman wrote that the mud was “such affectionate soil it clings to a fellow like an only brother.” Unfortunately, mud would be the least of the First Maine’s worries in a matter of days.³⁷

By the time the First Maine Heavy Artillery arrived at Belle Plain the Army of the Potomac was actively engaged in heavy action in and around the vicinity of Spotsylvania Court House, Virginia. These veteran Union troops had been fighting, marching, and counter marching since the beginning of May, and the wear and tear of almost

³⁶ Coates, “The Bloody First Maine,” 38.

¹ ³⁷ Walter S. Gilman, “Life in Virginia or Thirty Four Days in Grant’s Army in the Field, by a Crippled
² Soldier” ms. Lewis Leigh Collection, drawer 3, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle
³ Barracks, PA. Herein cited as Gilman, “Life in

uninterrupted action was quickly taking its toll both physically and mentally. The regiments that had marched off to the front in 1861 and through the summer of 1862 were mere shadows of themselves. With some regiments barely able to count 300 men available for service, these veteran regiments of the Army of the Potomac were not ready to warmly embrace the fresh faces of the Heavy Artillery Regiments that had spent all of their time in relative comfort behind the fortified walls that protected Washington. Even though a majority of the First Maine Heavy Artillery had enlisted in the summer of 1862, (the same time as 16th, 17th, 19th, and 20th Maine) the veterans of the Army of the Potomac considered these newly arrived troops soft since they had spent more time behind the protecting walls of forts, than in the field.

On May 17, 1864, the First Maine Heavy Artillery left Belle Plain and marched almost two hours to the City of Fredericksburg where they crossed the Rappahannock River and began to hear the roar of guns in the distance.³⁸ Upon arriving at the front on the morning of the May 18th the Heavy Artillery Regiments began to see the results of war. The view of the battlefield was not a pleasant sight to behold for the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery as there were dead and wounded soldiers from both sides, some in small groups, others laid out individually across the battlefield. While the men in the First Maine Heavy Artillery were in awe of the sights they were witnessing, the veterans of the Army of the Potomac were in awe of the size of these new regiments. As the Heavy Artillery regiments marched by, more than a few veterans remarked “what division is this?” Other Union veterans were quick to ridicule the new arrivals, calling them

⁴³⁸James M Rich, Diary, ts. Folger Library, Paul W. Bean Collection, University of Maine, Orono, Maine.
5 Herein cited as Rich,

“bandbox soldiers” or “Old Abe’s Pets.” Some of the more soured veterans took pleasure in showing these new arrivals the horrors of the battlefield that awaited these Heavy Artillery Regiments. One of these groups stood by the road with a blanket covering a horribly mangled corpse. As the Heavy Artillery men passed, these veterans lifted the blanket and called out to these new arrivals making sure they knew what awaited them on the front line. Others veterans told the large regiments not to worry, for soon General Grant would cut them down to fighting weight. It did not take long before duty at the front began to take its toll on the First Maine Heavy Artillery.³⁹

³⁹ Alfred Seelye Roe, and Charles Nutt, The History of the First Regiment of Heavy Artillery Massachusetts Volunteers Formerly the Fourteenth Regiment of Infantry 1861-1865 (Worcester, MA: Commonwealth Press, 1917) 151. Herein cited as Roe, The First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery.

Chapter 4

Novices in the Art of War

By the spring of 1864 the battle-hardened veterans of the Army of the Potomac although still dedicated to the cause of preserving the Union, were beginning to tire from the constant hardship and struggles they had to endure. The previous two-and-a-half years of conflict had devastated the once swelling ranks of most regiments from their enlistment high of 1000 men down in some cases to less than 200 men who still were capable of enduring the hardships of active campaigning. Throughout 1861 and 1862 these veterans quickly learned how to fight in what some historians call the first modern war.

Advancements in weaponry quickly made obsolete the notions of how the war would be fought. The Napoleonic tactics of tightly formed lines of battle marching forward to do battle across an open field were obsolete due to the developments of field entrenchments and rifled muskets. It remained to be seen if a regiment like the First Maine Heavy Artillery trained in the military tactics of 1861 could use their impressive size in numbers in shock-troop fashion and overpower a well-experienced enemy and overcome the modernization of Civil War combat. The men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, now part of the Army of the Potomac, would not have to wait long to find out.

After being briefly under fire on May 18th, the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery spent the first part of the day on May 19th encamped in a wooded grove near an open field just off the Fredericksburg Pike outside of Spottsylvania Court House. The men were still adjusting to life at the front and many of them wished that they were back

in the more comfortable surroundings of the forts in Washington or, even more desirable, back among their families and friends in the towns and villages of Eastern Maine. Private Asa Dore wrote to his wife in early June, "I have not heard from you since I left Washington. I feel anxious to hear from home... I have not much news to tell you nor much time to spare I would like to be at home today."⁴⁰

Most of the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery were still trying to adjust to the long marches, the constant ridicule by veterans of the Army of the Potomac, and the mortal danger they faced by being under fire. Additionally these men were just beginning to see for the first time the debris of battle. Mangled corpses of dead from both sides, the cries of the wounded, and the overall smell of death left many of these men uneasy and anxious. While a few members of the regiment like Private Marcus B. Alley of Co. L, who had served with other regiments and had seen combat before, most of the regiment had no idea what it was like to be in combat themselves.⁴¹

Encamped not far from Union General Ulysses S. Grant's headquarters, the men of the First Maine, along with the other freshly arrived Heavy Artillery regiments of General Robert O. Tyler's 4th Division of the Second Army Corps, found themselves holding the rear right flank of the Union Army. While Tyler's division took advantage of the lull in activity, the vanguard of the Union Army was already disengaging from the lines around Spotsylvania, Virginia, and preparing to move south towards Richmond in an all out attempt to outflank Confederate General Robert E. Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia. With the bulk of Grant's Army preparing to move south, there was no

¹ ⁴⁰ Asa Dore to Elizabeth Dore, June, 1864. Dore Family Letters. ts.

² ⁴¹ Marcus B. Alley, "It Was a Fearful Charge," Sunday News (Charleston, SC, 18 July 1897). Herein cited

expectation that the men of Tyler's division would be faced with a direct threat from the veteran troops of Lee's Army.

On the morning of May 19th, Confederate General Ewell had used his entire division for the flanking movement to determine the disposition of the Union Army. Shortly after 3:30 p.m., after hours of marching, Ewell's column, some 6000 men strong with the General Stephen Ramsuer's North Carolina Brigade in the lead, emerged from the woods that had concealed their approach. Confederate skirmishers quickly came upon the pickets of the Fourth New York Heavy Artillery. Captain Augustus Brown of the Fourth New York recalled that the appearance of the large Confederate force quickly forming into line of battle as being a magnificent sight to behold. The Confederates troops soon realized that if they could push through the small picket line of the 4th New York Heavy Artillery they could capture a large Union supply train parked nearby. To many of the Confederate troops the temptation proved to be too much to resist. So while the Union teamsters fled in panic many of the Confederate soldiers broke ranks and attempted to capitalize on the opportunity to resupply themselves.⁴²

While the tenuous situation was developing along the line of the Fourth New York Heavy Artillery, the First Maine Heavy Artillery had spent most of the early part of the day relaxing in a wooded grove just off the Fredericksburg Pike. At about 3:00 p.m. the First Maine Heavy Artillery was moved about a mile closer to General Meade's headquarters and then the regiment was ordered to make camp for the night.⁴³

3 as Alley, "It Was a Fearful

4⁴²William D. Matter, If It Takes All Summer: The Battle of Spotsylvania (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 323. Herein cited as Matter, "If It Takes All Summer."

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7⁴³Gilman, "Life in

The day was reportedly sunny and very warm, but at about 4:00 p.m., in what could be seen as an omen for the Heavy Artillery men, dark heavy clouds descended from the sky and unleashed torrents of rain upon the men from both armies. At the same time the sounds of thunder started rolling through the sky, the echo of musket fire could be heard coming from the direction of the Harris Farm and the Union supply wagons.

Almost at the same moment that the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery realized what was happening, a Union Staff Officer, possibly Alexander Porter of General Grant's staff, rode up and had a brief discussion with Colonel Daniel Chaplin about the situation and ordered him to take his regiment toward the sound of the action.⁴⁴

Private George Coffin of Company H recalled that in an instant Colonel Chaplin jumped on his horse and gave the order "Fall in First Maine."⁴⁵ Private Walter Gilman of Company A recalled that in less time than it takes to relay the events, the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery fell in as ordered, ready to face for the first time the challenge of the battlefield. As the men got ready to move, Colonel Chaplin reminded them of their duty and told them of his desire that they carry out their duty like men. With torrential sheets of rain coming down, the First Maine Heavy Artillery, along with the First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, which was encamped nearby, moved off quickly towards the sounds of the quickly growing battle.⁴⁶

Colonel Daniel Chaplin had experienced the uneasiness of leading green troops into battle before. He had done so at First Bull Run, as the Major of the Second Maine in

⁸⁴⁴ Horace Porter, Campaigning with Grant (New York: Century, 1897) 127.

⁹⁴⁵ Coffin, "Three Years," 11.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Gilman, "Life in Virginia."

July of 1861.⁴⁷ Now, almost three years later, he was doing it again, except this time he was going to be leading his men against a much more experienced foe. Chaplin had been training and drilling his men since the regiment was first formed in the summer of 1862 in Bangor, Maine. Now, two years later and hundreds of miles from the Pine Tree State, it was time to see if the skill and discipline he had tried to instill in his command would hold up under the weight of combat with a determined enemy. If Colonel Chaplin was uneasy, he did not show it and remained calm and in control. Almost 1000 men strong and larger than any other Union brigade, the First Maine Heavy Artillery marched off to meet their foe, with full knapsacks, haversacks, blanket rolls, red trimmed artillery frock coats, and clean weapons.

For the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery the experience of their first battle was going to be an unwelcome dose of reality as to what war was really like. The confusion, the noise, and the mortal danger all combined to make the soldier during the Civil War quickly feel as if he was in a very foreign place.

As the First Maine Heavy Artillery pushed up the road towards the sound of the firing, a portion of the command made up of the Second and Third Battalions wheeled into line along the right flank of the First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery. The First Battalion of the First Maine Heavy Artillery continued up the road toward the Union Supply Wagons. Portions of the Confederate advance had driven off the wagon drivers and were now rummaging through the various unguarded provisions and equipment. The prospects of filling one's haversack with more substantive rations and the possibility of

11⁴⁷ For information on the Second Maine at First Bull Run see James H. Mundy, Second to None: The
12 Story of the 2d Maine Volunteers "The Bangor Regiment" (Scarborough, ME: Harp
13 Publications, 1992).

replacing worn and ragged clothing quickly outweighed any desire to outflank the Union troops advancing upon their position. The Confederate veterans, distracted by the bounty of goods they had come across, failed to see the approach of the First Maine until the Down Easters were almost upon them. With the appearance of the First Maine Heavy Artillery and with the support of the veteran First Maryland Infantry, the Union troops made the Confederate looters quickly realize their peril and forced them to retreat towards the main Confederate line. After driving the Confederate raiders off and securing the supply wagons, the First Battalion of the First Maine turned towards the still advancing column of the Confederate main line.

With the First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery holding the left flank of the Union line at the Harris Farm, the Second and Third Battalions of the First Maine had their line stretched out upon the crest of a hill that ran across the field towards the Alsop House. The First Battalion of the First Maine Heavy Artillery supported by the Union First Maryland Infantry were to the right of the Alsop house holding extreme right flank of the Union line.⁴⁸ The Union line stretched in a double file from the Harris Farm across the crest of a hill that ran up towards the Peyton House on the right. Across the ridge line of the hill a solid wall of Union Heavy Artillery men stood in battle formation prepared to meet the Confederate advance.⁴⁹

Leading the Confederate probe across the rolling field up a slight rise towards the Union line was General Stephen Ramseur's veteran North Carolina Brigade. These troops, in addition to having been on the march all morning, were suffering from the

14⁴⁸ Chas Camper and J.W. Kirkley, Historical Record of the First Regiment Maryland Infantry
15 (Washington, DC: Gibson Brothers, 1871) 142.

effects of almost nonstop fighting since the overland campaign had opened at the beginning of the month. As Ramseur saw the Union Heavy Artillery men advance upon him, he steadied his men and prepared them to meet the oncoming Federals.⁵⁰ Both the Maine and Massachusetts regiments advanced onto the battlefield in parade formation. One Massachusetts man wrote, “As if on parade we marched, touching elbows, into the woods we went in a complete line reserving fire.”⁵¹

Not to be outdone, the First Maine Heavy Artillery also advanced in this fashion under the command of Colonel Chaplin. Now was the moment Chaplin had been training his command for since the formation of the regiment. As the First Maine was marched into position one soldier recalled that the men “were terribly excited and were all giving orders, there was a terrible racket.”⁵²

As Colonel Chaplin tried to steady his line he moved out in front of the regiment in preparation for the movement forward. Private Johnny Welch of Company H had trouble keeping his place in line as the first few shots from the Confederates hit among the ranks of the First Maine. Without being ordered to, Private Welch dropped to his knees and began to open fire across the field. Upon noticing actions of this ambitious soldier, Colonel Chaplin ordered him back into line and instructed the regiment to hold their fire while they continued to advance.⁵³

16⁴⁹ Matter, “If it Takes All Summer,”

17⁵⁰ Gary W. Gallagher, Stephen Dodson Ramseur: Lee’s Gallant General (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985) 114. Herein cited as Gallagher, Stephen Dodson Ramseur.

19⁵¹ Noah Andre Trudeau, “The Battle of Harris Farm: Woe to the Heavy Artillery,” Civil War Times

20 Illustrated March 1988: 23.

21⁵² Coffin, “Three Years,” 11.

22⁵³ Coffin, “Three Years,”

After a few quick advances by Ewell's command that were checked by a determined Union defense, the engagement was closed with a fierce three- to four-hour stand-up fight at close range in a drenching rain that lasted until night descended on the battlefield and Ewell decided to withdraw. The effects of the engagement and the stand-up fight were tremendous and devastating for both sides. Enlisted men and officers were both represented on the growing list of casualties. On the Confederate side, General Richard Ewell himself was thrown to the ground when his horse was killed underneath him. Some reports said the fall had knocked him senseless and made him confused and unwilling to continue the fight.⁵⁴

As the fight raged on, from left to right the Union line was made up of the Fourth New York Heavy Artillery, First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, First Maine Heavy Artillery, and the veteran First Maryland Infantry, which was just returning from leave when the fighting broke out at Harris Farm. Also supporting the Union effort were the Second and Seventh New York Heavy Artillery. For hours, both battle lines poured more and more fire into the other. In a scene very similar to the early days of the war both armies stood straight up in formation without seeking cover and fired as fast as they could load. One veteran of the Union Army Second Corps who arrived on the battlefield after the engagement wrote:

we found the scene of conflict a short distance away on the Fredericksburg Turnpike. A portion of Ewell's corps had gained a position in our rear where our wagon train is in park, and the Rebels, inspired by thought of full bellies, had attacked our forces. They were wading into the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery. The 1st Heavies were 1800 strong and presented a splendid front to the foe-much larger than any brigade of ours-but this was

23⁵⁴ Donald C. Pfan, Richard S. Ewell: A Soldier's Life (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 24 1998)

their first experience on the battlefield and they didn't understand how to take advantage of the situation. Being Novices in the art of war, they thought it cowardly to lie down, so the Johnnies were mowing them flat.⁵⁵

The bitter stand up fight hit hard upon the ranks of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. It truly was a baptism of fire. As the bullets from Ewell's command slammed into the ranks of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, scores and scores of Maine men fell. For these men, most of whom had never been in combat before, the sights and sounds of battle were as indescribable as they were destructive.

The "cries of pain from loved comrade's wounded or dying, the rattle of musketry, the sound of leaden missiles tearing through trees, and the dull thud of bullets that found their human marks, produced a feeling of horror" among those who survived the battle.⁵⁶ The fire, smoke, and sounds of wounded and dying men mixed with the sounds of pouring rain, nervous screams, and the shouts of orders and counter orders all came together and created a surreal scene of confusion. Even with all of this confusion the rookies of the First Maine Heavy Artillery remained as steady as possible.

Describing the engagement at Harris Farm, Charles J. House of Co. E wrote that as the battle raged for over two hours the men of the First Maine steadfastly and calmly carried out their duty: "During all this time the men stood, and fought just as you see them in pictures, they were the coolest lot of men I ever saw under any circumstances. They loaded, took aim and fired, then would deliberately clear the smoke from their guns

²⁵⁵⁵ John W. Haley, The Rebel Yell and the Yankee Hurrah: The Civil War Journal of a Maine Volunteer, ed. Ruth L. Silliker (Camden, ME: Down East Books, 1985) 160. Herein cited as Haley,

The

26 Rebel Yell.

²⁷⁵⁶ Roe, The First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery,

by half clocking, throwing off the old caps and blowing into the muzzle always giving the gun time to cool a little before reloading.”⁵⁷

While the ranks of the First Maine Heavy Artillery efficiently carried out their orders and blasted away at the ranks of the Confederates less than a hundred yards across the field, they received as good as they gave. Charles House wrote that men were falling all around him, and that those who were able to move went to the rear while those who were not able to move lay quietly all along the line. Their comrades were too much engaged with their work to notice much about the wounded, dead, and dying all around them until the enemy retired and the firing ceased.⁵⁸

The fight up and down the line at Harris Farm was reminiscent of the days when armies stood in orderly formations and fired at close range into the ranks of their enemy. Tactics like this were what was called for when soldiers only carried smoothbore muskets that were seldom accurate to any degree over 75 yards. By 1864 the stand-up ordered fight of firing lines was mostly a thing of the past. With rifled muskets and conical bullets the Civil War Enfield or Springfield musket were by some accounts accurate up to 400 yards. The distance that the First Maine Heavy Artillery and the other Heavy Artillery Regiments stood up and fired into the ranks of their Confederate enemy was estimated to be as close as 75 yards. At this distance the fire poured out by both sides was as accurate as it was deliberate. The fact that the Heavy Artillery men, fresh from the forts of Washington, could withstand such a murderous fire at such a close range without

²⁸ Charles J. House, “How the First Maine Heavy Artillery Lost 1,179 Men in Thirty Days,” Maine Bugle,

²⁹ Rockland, 2 (1895): 90. Herein cited as House. “How the First Maine.”

³⁰ ⁵⁸ House, “How the First Maine,”

flinching earned these newly arrived troops, albeit begrudgingly, the respect of the veterans of the Army of the Potomac.⁵⁹

As the battle continued the First Maine Heavy Artillery paid a very heavy price. Most of the regiment stood in an open field with no cover and exchanged blows with the Confederate foe. Where cover was available the effectiveness of the Confederate fire was less devastating. Company D, which was at the end of the First Maine's line guarding the right flank, found itself positioned in a small wooded area. This small amount of cover was just enough so that Company D only lost one man, Corporal Charles W. Smith, who joined the regiment in November 1862 as an 18-year-old recruit from Bangor. On this day Smith was serving as a member of the color guard. He was wounded on May 19 and died two days later. Corporal Daniel Snow, also serving on the color guard of the First Maine Heavy Artillery was killed on May 19 as was Corporal Henry O. Smilely.⁶⁰

The number of casualties among the members of the color guard could be explained by the fact that the flags of the regiment were the most visible targets on the field that day. Private George Coffin wrote that after the first few exchanges of volleys it was impossible to see the enemy even though they were only a hundred yards away. At one point Private Coffin wrote that the only target that was visible through the smoke were the flags of the enemy, and when the enemy flags became visible Private Coffin and his file partner looked at each other and then fired at the same time at the visible target. It can be reasoned that the Confederate did the same in their best efforts to return the favor. As the battle raged, George Coffin wrote that after a volley or two it was all smoke and

31⁵⁹ Joseph T. Glattharr, "Battlefield Tactics," Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand, ed. James M. McPherson and William J. Cooper, Jr. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998) 64. Herein cited as Glattharr, "Battlefield Tactics."

confusion and we could see nothing to fire at, but they kept on until the Rebels gave it up and retreated. According to Private Coffin he fired his rifle about 20 times until it got so hot that he could not touch the iron barrel.⁶¹

In order to have stood up and keep a determined enemy who was less than 100 yards away at bay, and to deter any further advancement of the line, each side poured a murderous fire into the other. As the battle raged, soldiers from both sides dealt with the unique challenges this type of stand up fight posed. The repeated firing of a black powder rifled musket would quickly turn the iron barrel into a scorching piece of metal that could not be handled with bare hands without suffering severe burns. It is possible that the torrential rain falling during the battle helped keep the barrels cooler, but eventually the heat would be too much. In addition to the intense heat caused by repeated firing, black powder weapons were quickly fouled and became more difficult to load and eventually unusable as powder residue built up on the inside of the barrel. While the rain helped keep the barrels cooler it also could have very easily sped up the fouling process as damp gun powder tended not to burn as hot, resulting in possible misfires. In the firing line, one would have to either clean his musket after a dozen or so shots or pick up a cleaner musket from a fallen comrade. Since cleaning took longer it is more likely that the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery picked up cleaner muskets as they needed them. At the rate the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery were falling there were plenty of cleaner muskets available.⁶²

33⁶⁰ Shaw, The First Maine Heavy Artillery.

34⁶¹ Coffin, "Three Years," 11.

35⁶² Glattharr, "Battlefield Tactics,"

The longer the battle raged the more men from the First Maine Heavy Artillery became casualties of the regiment's first engagement. Hundreds were killed or mortally wounded including 28 officers and noncommissioned officers. Among the casualties was Captain WR Pattangall of Pembroke, Maine, commanding Company H, who was mortally wounded. He would die a few days later. He was greatly liked by his men and his presence would be greatly missed. Also killed was Captain William T. Parker of Company L while leading his company into the fray. Pattangall and Parker were only two of the many members of the First Maine Heavy Artillery who fell that day. A number of other commissioned officers fell wounded on this day. Some of the wounds were slight and their bearers would recover to varying degrees. Others would recover but bear the scars of this first engagement with the enemy forever. Second Lieutenant Isaac N. Morgan of Company B was shot in the eye leaving him blind in that eye for the rest of his life. Captain Frederick A. Cummings of Company M was wounded slightly in the left breast, saved in no small part by a pocket watch that was completely demolished.⁶³

For hours the deadly Confederate missiles found their marks amongst the ranks of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. After the war Charles House and Ervin Chamberlain, the man to his left in the line of battle, recounted how they both lost their rear rank file partners and the men to either side of them in the front rank. Chamberlain claimed to have been hit six times before the seventh shot fully disabled him from serving in the ranks again. Charles House, was by his own account, lucky on this day. He calculated that

⁶³Shaw, The First Maine Heavy Artillery, 434 - 450.

between the number of dead and wounded comrades that fell around him at least nine Confederate bullets came close enough to cause discomfort.⁶⁴

The first battle for the First Maine Heavy Artillery brought with it a large number of casualties. The regiment lost 155 to death or mortal wounds and another 375 men were wounded. In addition Private David Whitney of Company E and Private Kenny Deprey of Company G were captured. Privately Whitney was held in Rebel prison camps until he was released in November of 1864. Private Deprey was never heard from again.⁶⁵

The First Maine Heavy Artillery almost lost another man from Company E as a prisoner. The prospects of serving time in the rebel prisons, however, did not sit well with this unidentified soldier and he made his escape. In his quest to escape, this soldier overcame two of the enemy and brought in at least one prisoner of his own. Other members of the company managed to capture a Rebel captain and about 20 of his men.⁶⁶

After two-and-a-half hours of a long drawn out stand-up fight, the men of the Heavy Artillery regiments were relieved by the veterans of Hancock's II Corps. By this time the Confederates knew the battle was done and they had no further intentions of advancing on the Union lines. Instead, they slowly withdrew by their original route, but, as they did, they heckled their heavy artillery opponents and challenged them to advance.

Officers and men alike fell in droves all along the extended battle line of the First Maine Heavy Artillery; many were killed outright, others were dying, while even a

37⁶⁴House, "How the First Maine," 91.

38⁶⁵Shaw, The First Maine Heavy Artillery, 443 - 450.

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40⁶⁶House, "How the First Maine," 90 -

greater number were wounded. For many of those wounded, their suffering would continue and be further aggravated by poor medical treatment and other complications including gangrene caused by the haphazard medical treatment administered to them by their well-meaning comrades. Misapplied tourniquets on even minor wounds often led to deadly consequences.⁶⁷

At approximately 6:00 p.m. the survivors of the First Maine Heavy Artillery were pulled back from the front line and ordered to the rear and to return to their previous campsite. In a few short hours the makeup of the regiment had dramatically changed. The once full ranks were now somewhat thinned and in some companies the loss of officers and noncommissioned officers as well as a number of enlisted men left holes that could never be filled.

The loss of men was not the only casualty suffered by the regiment during their first engagement. Prior to marching into battle the men were ordered to leave any unnecessary equipment and baggage. Having just come from the forts in Washington, the men of the First Maine had full backpacks and haversacks that contained several changes of clothing and various other items including fresh blankets. The men were instructed to remove these items and place them in a pile as they marched off to face the enemy. Not having the experience of veterans the officers of the First Maine failed to have a guard posted for these items. Three to four hours later, after the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery had been relieved by the veterans of the 2nd Corps, they found that they also had been relieved of their supplies by these same veterans. This loss of clothing and blankets

41⁶⁷ Carol Reardon, "The Impact of Continuous Operations," The Spotsylvania Campaign, ed. Gary
42 Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) 193.

and other items was another rude introduction for the men of the First Maine to life at the front lines. Without their blankets and extra clothing the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery returned to their camp tired, cold, hungry, exhausted, and without many of comforts they had been accustomed to in Washington. Without their blankets and extra clothing the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery spent the night trying to come to terms with the events of the day, and while at the same time deal with the elements without their stuffed backpacks and haversacks.⁶⁸

Major George Sabine describe the battle and the toll it took on his regiment in his diary. His entry for May 19th contains the following:

about 5 P.M. moved on the double quick a mile or two to the right to check rebels who were attempting to turn our flank and get possession of our supply trains. Had already possession of portion of train when we arrived and drove them. Engaged the enemy from 5 to 10:30 p.m. until we had expended all our ammunition and were relived by Berry's Division. Our Brigade held tight against persistent efforts of the enemy to press through it. Fire very hot and severe. Our Reg't lost in killed and wounded about 461. Co. K, 2 Comm. Officers and 9 men killed, and about 34 wounded. Capt. Patingal and Lt. Bibber killed. Lt. Bibber buried where he fell and Capt. Patingal near the hospital where he died. Men behaved well. After replenishing ammunition, moved to the right and slept on our arms.⁶⁹

Throughout the night survivors from the engagement stumbled, limped, and walked into the bivouac of the First Maine. Officers attempted to account for the losses within their respective companies. Friends of the dead, wounded, and missing searched well into the night and throughout the next day trying to locate their comrades upon the field. Having to deal with the corpses of their comrades that littered the battlefield at

43⁶⁸ Haley, The Rebel Yell, 160.

44⁶⁹ John L. Raye, Island Sacrifice (Clarkson, ME: Dutch Island Press, 1993) 42. Herein cited as
45 Raye, Island .

Harris Farm was something new for the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. Viewing the destructive nature of war first hand was a trying and difficult experience for the men of the First Maine. To see for the first time the corpses of their comrades lying on the field, in some cases as if they were sleeping, and to see others that were in many various states of mutilation and manglation had to be a very emotional and moving scene.

Horace Shaw described the aftermath of the Battle of Harris Farm:

It was a great sorrow to some of us to perform for the first time the duty of burying the dead upon the battlefield. When they had been brought together, we saw among the upturned and bloody faces of many young and worthy officers, and men who were our friends and whose friends at home we knew. We had read and heard much of these sad experiences, but until now we had actually known nothing of the anguish we were to experience when we gave to our own comrades the rude burial in the long trench upon the battlefield. We could only cover their faces tenderly and faithfully marked, as best we could, their names, regiment, and company at their heads. Two of our most worthy captains, Parker and Pattengall, were laid at the head of this column of the dead.⁷⁰

The number of dead including the Confederate dead, which were all put in the roughly laid out graves, according to one officer of the Fourth New York Heavy Artillery, gave the countryside around the Harris Farm the appearance of a cemetery.⁷¹

For most of the dead from the First Maine Heavy Artillery, their graves would forever lie in the soils of Virginia hundreds of miles from the rocky shores and wooded hills and mountains of the Pine Tree State. For the first few years the dead of the First Maine would lie in the graves their comrades had prepared for them. Years after the war many of these dead were reinterred in the National Cemetery at Fredericksburg, VA, many in unmarked graves.

⁴⁶⁷⁰ Shaw, The First Maine Heavy Artillery, 212 - 213.

⁴⁷⁷¹ Augustus Brown, The Diary of a Line Officer by Captain Augustus C. Brown, Company H. Fourth New

Charles House also spent time looking for his comrades after the engagement.

What House saw was almost impossible to describe as he wrote after the war:

I accompanied a squad of men who were going on to the field to bring off the body of Lieutenant John F. Knowles of our company who had been killed. As we neared the point where we had stood in line I noticed eight or ten of our men laid out side by side, the beams of the moon struggling through the fleecy clouds, lighting their upturned faces all smeared with the smoke of battle, some showing gaping wounds and all ghastly and lifeless. Looking to right where the color guard and Company M had stood, was a similar lot of dead carefully laid out, beyond this another and another until the woods were reached, and the same thing away to the left. It was a solemn moment as I gazed on the scene at the midnight hour, my first look upon a deserted battlefield, and how forcibly those rows of dead men reminded me of the gabels of reaped grain among which I had worked on my native hills, but here the reaper was the angel of death. I picked up a canteen to replace my own which had been pierced by two bullets and hurried from the field. One look was enough.⁷²

The initial response to combat by the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery was sorrow and excitement at the same time. In one letter Private Peleg Bradford wrote to his mother about how the Rebels could not move the regiment one bit at Harris Farm but that the regiment had seen hard times since leaving Washington: “When we left Washington, we had a hundred and forty men in our Company, and now all that we have got is about seventy... We lost sixty men killed and wounded out of our company.” After one battle Peleg Bradford had seen enough when he looked upon the battlefield the morning. When he saw the dead of his regiment laid out on the field he wrote that he never wanted to see that sight again.⁷³

Most regiments would have ceased to exist after suffering 155 combat deaths in a single engagement, not to mention hundreds of more casualties. It was only the large size

48 York Heavy Artillery (New York: n.p., 1906)

49⁷²House, “How the First Maine,” 91.

of the First Maine Heavy Artillery that gave the regiment the ability to absorb these casualties. By comparison the First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery suffered 120 killed at the Battle of Harris Farm. This regiment was large enough to absorb their high number of casualties, yet the experience of the First Massachusetts at Harris Farm was significant enough that the survivors of the regiment erected a memorial in 1905 to honor their sacrifice and those of their fallen comrades. This monument is still the only memorial on the field at Harris Farm and for years the only tangible reminder of what happened on that piece of Virginia countryside.

The high casualties suffered by the First Maine Heavy Artillery served two primary purposes. First, the fact that the regiment was able to suffer through this high amount of casualties but still repulse a determined assault by battle-hardened Confederate veterans was a credit to the leadership of Daniel Chaplin. He kept his men under control and focused on the task at hand. Even as the tremendous noise and confusion of battle surrounded the First Maine Heavy Artillery, the “Colonel’s voice was distinctly heard. Above all the uproar of the strife, it was like a bugle, having more than the power of a thousand men.”⁷⁴

Those who survived the battle grew in their respect for the leadership of Daniel Chaplin and knew he could be counted on to lead them on the field of battle. The experience of the Battle of Harris Farm marked the first real dose of reality for the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery and it served to remove any doubts about the true danger

50⁷³Bradford, No Place for Little Boys, 85 -

51⁷⁴Reverend Henry C. Leonard, “Army Correspondence,” The Gospel Banner and Family Visitant
_____(Augusta, ME: July 23,

they faced. If they wanted to see this endeavor through, they had to closely follow their commander and rely on the training they had received.

The men and officers saw their performance in their first battle as something to be proud of. The fact that they had withstood the Confederate Assault when other regiments broke and ran was point of distinction for the regiment and these men from Maine knew it. Captain Frederick Howes wrote to his wife after the battle that “our first experience in battle was a very severe one but honorable to us as a Regiment, while the 7th New York (Heavy Artillery) broke and ran at the first fire” and gaining “for themselves a name in the army that everyone despises. We are not in their brigade now and that suits us fine.”⁷⁵

While the experience of the First Maine Heavy Artillery at the Battle of Harris Farm served to deepen the respect the men had in their Colonel it also instilled in them a false sense of confidence that they could meet the challenges of the battlefield effectively. It would be these two factors that would contribute to the disaster that would befall the First Maine Heavy Artillery only thirty days later.

52⁷⁵Fred Carr Howes to Mary A. Howes, May 26, 1864, Letters of Frederick Carr Howes.

Chapter 5

The Road South

After the Battle of Harris Farm, which had delayed Grant's offensive operations and his move towards Richmond by a day, the marching continued for the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. Still part of Robert O. Tyler's brigade, the First Maine and the other Heavy Artillery regiments had limited time to bask in the accolades given to them for their pluckiness in their first fight with the Confederate Army, to nurse their wounds, or to mourn their fallen comrades. Although having proven themselves on the battlefield the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery still had much to learn. Even though the veterans of the Union Army Second Corps were no longer picking on the heavy artillery men for their greenness, these heavy artillery troops had only just begun to understand the savage nature of war. For the officers of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, their adjustment was going to be even tougher.

It was easier to command men in the forts of Washington where the mortal dangers of combat and active campaigning were virtually nonexistent, but in the field the officers had to lead and command their men in an environment that was as hostile as it was foreign. Already the command structure of the First Maine Heavy Artillery was starting to strain under the weight of active campaigning. Key company officers that the men had come to respect and trust had fallen on the field at Harris Farm and could not readily be replaced. This situation would have greater consequences on the makeup of the regiment and its cohesiveness as the casualties would continue to mount during the spring campaign of 1864. Situations now developed where junior officers and non

commissioned officers with limited experience in command and even less experience in combat would be leading men on the field of battle.

On May 24, 1864, the grand experiment of having an entire division made up of heavy artillery regiments was ended and the First Maine was ordered to join General Preece's Brigade of the Third Division of the Second Army Corps. Three days later, the First Maine was ordered to join General Greshom Mott's Brigade of the Third Division.⁷⁶

Even after the stand-up fight at Harris Farm, the acceptance of the heavy artillery troops by veterans of the Army of the Potomac was still lukewarm. Some veterans claimed that only after they had arrived on the field at Harris Farm did the battle turn into victory for the Union. The only thing that these new arrivals had proven was that they were well drilled and because of their large numbers could absorb punishing casualties. The veterans still were not convinced that these Heavy Artillery men could fight. Colonel Robert McAllister, a veteran of Third Army Corps who had been wounded at Gettysburg, commented on the arrival of the Heavy Artillery troops. In particular he relayed his impressions of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. McAllister wrote, "We are getting a large army here. We have many regiments that have been over two years in service and until this campaign, had never been in battle. They have heretofore been in the defenses of Washington. We have a regiment of this kind just put in our brigade. It numbers 900 strong. They are called heavies having enlisted as heavy artillery. They are brought out of Washington well drilled, but, I fear for poor fighting and campaigning."⁷⁷ To some like

⁷⁶Frank J. Welcher, The Union Army, 1861-1865: Organization and Operations, vol.1: The Eastern Theater (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989) 178. Herein cited as Welcher, The Union Army. James Arnold, The Armies of US Grant (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1995) 207.

⁷⁷Robert McAllister, The Civil War Letters of General Robert McAllister, ed. James I. Robertson, Jr.

McAllister the First Maine Heavy Artillery still had a way to go in order to prove itself equal to the veteran troops of the Army of the Potomac.

Before the Battle of Harris Farm the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery were, as one fellow Maine soldier called them, “novices at the art of war.”⁷⁸ After the Battle of Harris Farm the men of the First Maine were novices no more. This experience proved that Colonel Chaplin had molded the First Maine Heavy Artillery into an organization that lacked nothing in the way of courage and discipline. The men of the First Maine proved that they were up to the challenge and would follow the orders given to them no matter what the cost.

The Battle of Harris Farm stands out when compared to the other battles that highlighted most of the rest of Grant’s overland campaign. Most battles during the spring of 1864 were centered on one army trying to dislodge the other from fixed or entrenched positions. At Harris Farm, with both sides standing in an open field virtually toe to toe in close-order formations, the ability to move companies in line of battle in a disciplined manner while under fire was crucial. The training the First Maine had experienced at the hands of Colonel Chaplin and the other officers gave the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery the ability to withstand the onslaught of General Ewell’s battle-hardened Confederate veterans. At the heart of this training was the continual drilling of the regiment through the concepts expressed in such manuals as Hardee’s Rifle and Light

58 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1965) 430. Herein cited McAllister, Letters.

59 According to the Official Records the First Maine Heavy Artillery had 1,789 men when they left

60 Washington. OR, Vol. 36, Pt. 1, p. 665.

61⁷⁸Haley, The Rebel Yell, 160.

Infantry Tactics, which placed emphasis on the disciplined speed of movement at both a company and regimental level.⁷⁹

Even though these Heavy Artillery regiments were well drilled these regiments suffered close to 900 killed or wounded in only a few short hours. This fact is evidence that in many respects the improvement in weaponry outpaced the improvement in tactics and training. The tactics used by the Heavy Artillery regiments at Harris Farm were all based on weapons of limited range and a misconception that a soldier had to be within 100 yards of his enemy in order to effectively engage him. Civil War historian Bruce Catton wrote that the American Civil War was the first modern war because the improved weaponry had a more effective range and greater killing power. Catton asserted that during the Civil War decisive engagements often took place with opposing lines more than a quarter of a mile away from one another. Veteran officers of the Army of the Potomac had a chance to view first hand the new realities of battle and to adapt the tactics they used. Unfortunately for the First Maine Heavy Artillery, their infantry training was not adapted to reflect the modern nature of Civil War combat.⁸⁰

After resting most of the day on May 20, 1864, those of the First Maine Heavy Artillery who could still march were ordered to fall in with the rest of Tyler's Heavy Artillery Brigade and join the march of the Second Corps at Massaponx Church on towards Guinea Station, VA. They arrived at Guinea Station just after dawn on May 21. The march as described by some New York Heavy Artillery men was fairly easy and the

⁶²⁷⁹ Andrew Haughton, Training, Tactics and Leadership in the Confederate Army of Tennessee: Seeds of Failure (Portland OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000) 57.

⁶⁴⁸⁰ Bruce Catton, America Goes to War (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1958) 17-18. Herein

⁶⁵ cited as Catton, America.

weather comfortable. That quickly changed on May 22nd when the day became very hot and humid. Soon choking dust, thirst, and a critical lack of water became the most potent enemies of the heavy artillery men still fresh from Washington and unaccustomed to rigors of active campaigning. Marching all through the day, groups of men from all the Heavy Artillery regiments in Tyler's command would break ranks whenever the prospects of finding water or other provisions looked promising at the Virginia homes and farms they passed along the way. Much to their chagrin the men quickly learned that no matter how fast they marched they were not as fast as the mounted cavalymen, who always seemed to have enough water and provisions courtesy of the same Virginia families along the route of march.⁸¹

Finally after a rapid march that lasted almost seventeen hours the First Maine and the other Heavy Artillery regiments arrived at Milford Station. They were ordered into line and instructed to prepare breast works for an expected assault. For two hours the backbreaking work continued as the men from Maine felled trees and dug entrenchments waiting for the attack to start. Not all of the men of the First Maine were busily engaged in preparing for a Confederate assault. Company D, under the command of Lt. Henry Sellers, was ordered forward of the main line to serve as pickets and warn of any impending assault. In a unfamiliar place and ordered to remain alert to any movement that might indicate a Confederate assault, the men of Sellers' Company were nervous and unsure of what to expect. It was dark in the middle of the woods thereby making it difficult to distinguish between friend or foe. The situation did not sit easily with the men

66⁸¹ Robert Keating, Carnival of Blood: The Civil War Ordeal of the Seventh New York Heavy Artillery
67 (Baltimore: Butternut & Blue, 1998) 66. Herein cited as Keating Carnival of .

of Company D. It was in a situation like this that previous combat experience would have been welcomed. Sometime during the darkness the Confederates moved up a gun and lobbed shells into the main line of the Union Army. Private Walter Gilman of Company D thought he was in for a fine time until the shells started going overhead. He recalled that he was so close to the Confederate line that he could hear them talking to one another. It was a stressful and tenuous position for the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery who were on picket duty that night.⁸²

During the night the Seventh New York, which was in line with the main body of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, was ordered to advance north of the Union line. It was to be a slow steady movement with men coming out of the trenches one at a time and moving deeper into the woods. There was a critical lack of officers in place to direct the men of the Seventh on where and in which direction they should be going. Without this direction at least four companies of the Seventh New York found themselves marching towards the rear of the Union line and behind the pickets of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. Lost and confused, the men of the Seventh New York Heavy Artillery made lots of noise trudging through the woods and tangled underbrush. They may not have given it much thought but the sound of men lost and moving in the woods sounded just the same as men moving forward for an assault. That is just what the pickets of the First Maine Heavy Artillery thought it was.

Without hesitation the pickets of the First Maine Heavy Artillery let loose a volley of musketry in the direction of the movement they heard. Two men in the Seventh New York Heavy Artillery were hit, one would die of his wounds, the other would live

68⁸² Gilman, "Life in Virginia."

but would never serve in the army again. Although the impact of this “friendly fire” from the pickets of the First Maine may have been minimal in the number of casualties it inflicted, it was disastrous for what it did to the rest of the Seventh New York Heavy Artillery. Believing they were under attack, almost the entire regiment abandoned their entrenchments and fled toward the rear. A few men of the Seventh New York did stay long enough to return fire as the pickets from the First Maine Heavy Artillery lost one man killed and one wounded,⁸³ but the majority of the Seventh ran for their lives, and only the last minute arrival of Colonel Morris, their commander, prevented the Seventh New York Heavy Artillery from being completely run off and spreading the fear driven retreat to other regiments like the First Maine Heavy Artillery.⁸⁴

It would be hard to imagine that under Chaplin’s direct leadership the First Maine Heavy Artillery would run in the face of the enemy. At Harris Farm the regiment stood fast under a writhing barrage from a much more experience foe. Even when the Seventh New York faltered at Harris farm and exposed the left flank of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, the men from Maine stood their ground under the watchful eye of their stern commander.⁸⁵ At Milford Station it was only the quick action and strong leadership of Colonel Morris that kept the Seventh New York Heavy Artillery from becoming completely routed. In the end, while the Seventh New York faltered, it was Colonel Chaplin’s leadership, personal bravery, and overall ability to inspire his men that kept his regiment on the battle line and under control.

69⁸³House, “How the First Maine,” 91.

70⁸⁴Keating, Carnival of Blood, 69.

71⁸⁵Keating, Carnival of Blood, 46-

The sense of discipline instilled in the First Maine Heavy Artillery by their officers helped many of the men stay calm under even the most trying of situations. On the night of May 22nd, the whole Union line was withdrawn to form another stronger line in the rear. Five pickets from Company D of the First Maine Heavy Artillery were not informed and were left behind. When the time came for them to be relieved no replacements had arrived, and finally the five pickets decided to return to the regiment upon first light. The returning pickets found out that most of the regiment had feared they had been lost to the enemy. Upon their return to the regiment the five pickets were personally greeted by Colonel Chaplin who thanked them for having “spunk enough to stand their ground and not to get scared by their shadows.” What this episode shows is Chaplin’s respect for men in his command who would put duty over personal safety. In this case the pickets of Company D exhibited this discipline by completing their duty instead of running for their immediate safety.⁸⁶

On May 24th the Heavy Artillery Brigade of General Robert O. Tyler was broken up with most of the heavy artillery regiments ordered to join other veteran brigades within the Second Army Corps. Most of these brigades after three long years of fighting were smaller than the heavy artillery regiments that were joining them, but these Second Corps veterans were hard-fought survivors. They and their commanders had developed a unique sense of knowing when not to expose themselves to unnecessary risk. This is not to say they did not relish a fight, for they had been looking for an overall commander who could lead them to victory and most would agree that they had found one in Grant. They also began to realize that with the way Grant was going to fight the war they had a good

72⁸⁶ Gilman, “Life in Virginia.”

chance of being around to see the full fruits of their labor in this war of attrition only if they did not take unnecessary risks. These veterans would continue to fight hard, yet they also learned to be cautious in the face of danger if they wanted to survive.

At first the First Maine Heavy Artillery was assigned to General Pierce's Brigade of Birney's Third Division, Second Army Corps. During this time the regiment was actively engaged in the assault and capture of key Confederate positions at Chesterfield Bridge across the North Anna River. Pierce's brigade, including the First Maine Heavy Artillery, advanced across Long Creek just north of the North Anna River, through plowed fields for a quarter mile. With bayonets fixed, Colonel Chaplin led his command across the field while shells from Confederate guns on the south bank of the North Anna exploded over head. "In splendid style... with... gallantly of bearing and rapidity of movement,"⁸⁷ the regiments of Pierce's brigade carried the Confederate works on the north side of the Chesterfield Bridge. According to Charles House it was one of the liveliest shellfire the regiment had ever seen.⁸⁸

Because of Chaplin's leadership, the First Maine Heavy Artillery was every bit equal that of the veteran regiments it advanced with. As soon as the regiment had taken possession of the former Confederate entrenchments the men began to strengthen their works hoping to turn back any Confederate counter attack. Shortly after midnight the expected Confederate counter attack came and even with the combined strength of Pierce's and General Egan's brigade the Union position could not be held. As soon as the Confederates recaptured the bridge they attempted to set it afire, but before the flames

73⁸⁷ Francis A. Walker, History of the Second Army Corps in the Army of the Potomac (New York: Charles

74 Scribner's Sons, 1897) 494. Herein cited as Walker, History of the Second Army Corps.

could completely engulf the bridge, the Seventh New York Heavy Artillery, which had already proved to be shaky under combat situations, was given a chance at redemption as it lead a new successful Union assault upon the Chesterfield Bridge. Soon after the assault of the Seventh New York Heavy Artillery, the First Maine Heavy Artillery was put to work extending the line along the North side of the North Anna to east of the Telegraph Road.⁸⁹

The First Maine Heavy Artillery remained along this line until the night of May 26th. Although not engaged in any heavy action, sharp shooters and a few shells from enemy guns made the men of the First Maine very aware that they were in a hostile environment. The constant threat of enemy fire began to wear on the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery and this stress seemed to manifest itself in some very suspicious wounds. Of the six soldiers from the First Maine Heavy Artillery wounded between May 23 and May 26, five received wounds in the hand or fingers. Two privates from Company H, Wilmot N. Burk and Albert C. Phinney from Stueban, Maine both had fingers amputated as a result of their wounds making them virtually useless for front line duty.⁹⁰ Both Burk and Phinney survived the rest of the war serving in non-front line capacities, and both were mustered out with the rest of the regiment in September of 1865. This evidence as well as evidence from other regiments including the Seventh New York Heavy Artillery shows that self mutilation by Union soldiers during Grant's

75⁸⁸House, "How the First Maine,"

76⁸⁹Keating, *Carnival of Blood*, 75.

77⁹⁰Shaw, *The First Maine Heavy Artillery*, 45.

overland campaign was one method by which soldiers tried to get out of facing additional combat.⁹¹

By the morning of May 27th the entire Second Corps had begun the process of withdrawing from the line along the southern bank of the North Anna River. With the Union army back across the river on the north bank and as the Union pioneers dismantled the pontoon bridges the First Maine and the Seventh New York Heavy Artillery were left to guard the Chesterfield bridge to ensure that the Confederates could not attack Grant's army from the rear.⁹²

While the Chesterfield Bridge had been set on fire by some of the Union troops the fires had gone out before they could completely destroy the bridge. Under a heavy fire from the Confederates on the south bank, a party from the Seventh New York Heavy Artillery ran back towards the brigade, pulled up the deck planks, cut the supports, and set fire to the bridge again. With covering fire from the First Maine Heavy Artillery and the rest of the Seventh New York Heavy Artillery that kept the Confederates from advancing, the small party of Union soldiers were able to fully destroy the bridge that only days before they had fought so hard to save and secure.

By noon on May 27th the First Maine Heavy Artillery was again on the march with the rest of the Union Army Second Corps. In what amounted to almost a 30-mile march overland and over the numerous creeks, streams, and rivers that marked the route to Hanover Court House and further south, the column finally marched into line facing the Confederates near the small village of Cold Harbor on the morning of June 2, 1864.

78⁹¹Keating, Carnival of Blood,

79⁹²Keating, Carnival of Blood,

The march from Spottsylvania to Cold Harbor served to further expose the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery to the rigors of combat. With Colonel Chaplin in command the regiment performed relatively well and did not falter when pressed hard by the enemy. While other Heavy Artillery regiments like the Seventh New York had faltered there are no reported instances that the First Maine Heavy Artillery hesitated or suffered from any widespread breakdown in discipline that cause them to waver in the face of combat with the enemy. Their relative success during this period worked to further support the idea that the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery were well prepared to face the rigors of the battlefield. However, the evidence of self inflicted wounds within the ranks of the First Maine Heavy Artillery shows that the reality of war was beginning to lose its luster for some members of the regiment.

Chapter 6

The Case of Lt. Emery Wardwell

The march from Spotsylvania to Cold Harbor was long and rough on the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. The heat and humidity of the Virginia summer hit hard upon the ranks. It was not only the enlisted men who suffered, but some of the officers also had difficulty keeping up with the march. Given Colonel Chaplin's adherence to discipline he expected his officers to exhibit the same military bearing and was intolerant of anyone in his command who violated these precepts, especially his officers. When he saw that one of his officers was stricken on the march and forced to ride in an ambulance he clearly did not like what he saw.

The officer stricken on the march was 1st Lt. Emery Wardwell. Emery Wardwell of Bucksport, Maine, was one of the key organizers of Company G and was commissioned as a 2nd Lt. when the regiment was first mustered in 1862. He was promoted to 1st Lt. in March of 1863, but he was never very healthy, spending a good deal of time in the hospital due to illness while the regiment served in the forts guarding Washington. When the First Maine Heavy Artillery left to join Grant's army, Lt. Wardwell joined them and was present with his company and participated in the Battle of Harris Farm. However, beginning on May 21 and lasting until the First Maine Heavy Artillery reached Cold Harbor, Emery Wardwell was in and out of Army ambulances and hospitals. It was Colonel Chaplin's perception that Wardwell's absence was unnecessary, especially when Army doctors had found him fit to return to duty. Given the fact that he

was absent without orders and not present when the regiment was under fire only served to further motivate Chaplin to take corrective action.

On June 6, 1864, 1st Lt. Wardwell was formally charged by his commander with the infractions of (1) being absent without leave, (2) disobedience of orders, and (3) misbehavior in the face of the enemy. Colonel Chaplin placed Emery Wardwell under arrest and ordered him confined to camp. He was relieved of his side arms and stripped of his authority to command.⁹³

In a court martial that was convened on June 11, 1864, and included Lt. Thomas Foster of the First Maine Heavy Artillery as one of the judges, Lt. Emery Wardwell was put on trial. Wardwell pleaded not guilty to all counts and was given the opportunity to directly question a full array of witnesses, including his commander Colonel Chaplin. In this interrogatory Chaplin called Wardwell an efficient officer, but cited that he was not with the regiment a majority of the time and that he left his command without orders. Chaplin stated that the only time he really knew of Wardwell's whereabouts was when Chaplin saw him riding in an ambulance.⁹⁴

The trial by some accounts lasted only about 45 minutes and according to Lt. Wardwell was very hurried. Lt. Wardwell tried to argue that the charges brought against him were the result of ill feelings his commander had for him and not for any specific wrong doing. This argument was quickly overruled by the Judge Advocate, who stated the court had no time to listen to such remarks. With this rebuke, Lt. Wardwell, who later

80⁹³ Emery Wardwell to Maine Adj. Gen. Hodsdon, August 18, 1864. ms. Correspondence of the First

81 Maine Heavy Artillery. Maine State Archives, Augusta Maine. Herein cited as Wardwell,

82 "Letter."

83⁹⁴ Court Martial Records of Lt. Emery Wardwell, First Maine Heavy Artillery, National Archives,

84 Washington

claimed to be greatly ill at the time of the trial and therefore unable to give a vigorous defense of himself, finished his cross examination and presentation of his case by asking that the court not find him guilty or at least not to fine him as he had family at home that depended on his financial support.⁹⁵

Without much debate the court found Lt. Emery Wardwell guilty of all charges and ordered him to be dismissed from the service of the United States. As he requested Lt. Wardwell was not fined and he would be allowed to return home to his family in Bucksport, Maine. Lt. Wardwell was dismissed from the First Maine Heavy Artillery and the service of the United States on July 11, 1864. In the time between his court martial and his actual dismissal Lt. Wardwell continued to suffer from the poor health that had caused his trouble in the first place, but according to one account when he was well enough he participated in the actions of the regiment including the advance on Petersburg which started on June 16, 1864.⁹⁶

By August of 1864, Lt. Wardwell began the long process of trying to get his case reopened and the charges reversed. In a letter to General Hodsdon, the adjutant General of Maine, Emery Wardwell wrote, "General, I have tried not to dishonor my name and my dear native state, and before God, in whom I trust, I feel innocent of the accusations against me.... I now am a broken down man, both in body and character. I can bear the destruction of my health , but I feel deeply the disgrace of a dismissal after trying so hard to perform my duty for nearly two years."⁹⁷

⁸⁵⁹⁵Wardwell, "Letter."

⁸⁶⁹⁶"Record of Company G, First Maine Heavy Artillery" ts. Maine State Archives, Augusta, Maine.

⁸⁷ Herein cited as "Record of Company G."

⁸⁸⁹⁷Wardwell,

This letter and Wardwell's unsuccessful subsequent efforts to get his case reexamined continued right up until the time of his death in February of 1897. Almost as soon as his efforts started Wardwell had to face the difficult reality that many who knew about his case were no longer alive to be cross examined or to support his claim as the hard hand of war continued to deplete the ranks of the First Maine Heavy Artillery through the summer and fall of 1864. Although unable to get his case reopened, Wardwell was able to prove that his term of service permanently injured his health and for his troubles he was awarded an invalid pension, which at the time of his death was \$24 a month.

In a record of Company G prepared after the war, some handwritten remarks by an unknown author state the following in regards to the case of Lt. Emery Wardwell:

This officer, 1st Lt. Emery S. Wardwell, claims he was unjustly dismissed (from) the service July 11, 1864. Subsequent events, and investigations by James E Hall, Post No. 53 G.A.R, Dept. Maine, justify Lt. Wardwell's claim. He had no difficulty in obtaining a pension, for disabilities incurred in the line of duty, on a claim filed immediately after the close of the war. And after thorough investigation of his case by James E. Hall, Post No. 53 G.A.R., Dept. Maine located at Bucksport Me. He was mustered as a comrade of that post and still remains an honored member. Surgeon AR. Lincoln, and Col. Z. A Smith (the last Col. of the First Maine Heavy Artillery), have both, in public speeches made at reunions of the regiment vindicated Lt. Wardwell and express their belief that a very cruel mistake was made in this officer's dismissal. This is a matter of record in the books of the First Maine Heavy Artillery Association.⁹⁸

The case of Lt. Wardwell was not unique, as hundreds of officers in the Union army were dismissed for infractions such as his. This case is a further example of the lengths Colonel Chaplin would go to keep the military bearing of his regiment in top form. It is clear that every officer of the First Maine who testified at Wardwell's court

martial was in complete agreement with Colonel Chaplin that, regardless of his medical condition at the time, Lt. Wardwell had left the regiment without orders while the regiment was in the presence of the enemy. It was only after the war that anyone in the First Maine Heavy Artillery dared to publicly state that what happened to Lt. Emery Wardwell was a miscarriage of justice, yet even these claims do not specifically point to who was responsible for carrying out this miscarriage. The public decrees that Lt. Emery Wardwell had been wronged by the forces of military justice were probably possible only because of the death of Colonel Chaplin in August 1864. Had Colonel Chaplin been alive after the war it is hard to imagine that he would have not have spoken out against the efforts, including a bill introduced in Congress to have Lt. Wardwell's war record amended to remove the court martial findings against him.⁹⁹

Not all survivors of the First Maine Heavy Artillery spoke of Lt. Emery Wardwell. When Horace Shaw and Charles House wrote the original regimental history and wrote favorably about Colonel Chaplin and the fatherly image he cast upon the entire regiment they failed to make any reference to the court martial of Lt. Emery Wardwell or about the perception by some in the regiment that he was wrongly convicted.

Through the long marches from Spotsylvania to Cold Harbor, Colonel Chaplin drove his men hard and expected his officers to do the same. His sway over his men came from his military bearing and his adherence to strict discipline and order. He had tried to instill these same qualities in his men during the two years the regiment had served as garrison troops in the forts around Washington. He had also seen first hand

89⁹⁸“Record of Company

90⁹⁹“Record of Company

through his regiment's strong performance at the Battle of Harris Farm a confirmation that his leadership had built a formidable fighting unit that could withstand the onslaught of even the most seasoned enemy. Colonel Chaplin was not about to chance a breakdown in his regiment's ability to follow orders even if it meant that one of his officers would have to face the embarrassment of a court martial.

What this incident further highlights is that Colonel Chaplin's desire for military discipline was one of the fundamental components of his leadership. He and his officers had always been quick to punish infractions while the regiment was on garrison duty and the Wardwell case indicated that the same adherence to discipline would be expected while the regiment was in the field. The fact that Emery Wardwell was an officer and had been with the regiment since its formation signifies that Colonel Chaplin expected all members of the regiment, regardless of rank or position, to fulfill their duty. The fact that no fellow officer of Lt. Wardwell spoke in defense of him at the time of the court martial further indicates how deeply Colonel Chaplin was respected.

Chapter 7

Cold Harbor, a Vision of the Future

Since early May the veterans of the Army of the Potomac had been fighting almost continuously. When they were not fighting they were in the process of marching on to the next battlefield, and if they were not fighting or marching then they were likely digging in and getting ready to start fighting at a moment's notice. The fights at North Anna had been especially hard on the veterans of the Army of the Potomac. Frank Wilkeson, an artillery man from New York, wrote: "At North Anna I discovered that our infantry were tired of charging earthworks. Here I first heard savage protests against a continuation of the general ship which consisted in launching good troops against entrenched works that the generals had not inspected."¹⁰⁰

While most veterans had respected General Grant for his willingness to take the war to the Confederates of Robert E. Lee, they were beginning to realize that Grant's desire to finally defeat the enemy would come at a cost that they themselves would pay heavily for. The only question was, how high would the cost be?

The answer would come soon enough at a sleepy little Virginia crossroad called Cold Harbor. Losses in the Army of the Potomac from the period from June 1 to June 12, 1864 are estimated as follows: killed and wounded 10,971, missing 1816, for a total of 12,787. That averages out to over 1,000 casualties a day. The Union Army Second Corps took the brunt on Grant's offensive operations at Cold Harbor. Of the 26,900 soldiers

¹⁰⁰Wilkeson, Turned Inside Out, 121.

present for duty the Second Corps had 494 men killed, 2442 wounded and 574 missing, a total of 3510 casualties at Cold Harbor.¹⁰¹

A soldier in the 25th Massachusetts wrote that his regiment had landed at Bermuda Hundred on the May 5, 1864, with 700 splendid veterans. One month's fighting in the rear of Richmond reduced this number to a trifle over 300; and the morning after the Battle of Cold Harbor there were only 100 men fit for duty. "The Gallant six hundred, where were they? Killed, wounded, in the hospital, and down in Southern prisons."¹⁰² Clearly the veterans of the Union army were beginning to sour over the prospects of their survival under this new type of warfare.

At the time of offensive operations at Cold Harbor the First Maine Heavy Artillery found itself assigned to the Third Brigade (under the command General Gershom Mott) in General David Birney's Third division of the Second Army Corps. Joining the First Maine in Mott's Brigade was the Sixteenth Massachusetts, One Hundred Fifteenth Pennsylvania, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Eleventh New Jersey. These other regiments were all veteran regiments that had originally been part of the Third Army Corps, which had been decimated at Gettysburg, causing the Corps to be disbanded during the early winter months of 1864 while the Union Army was in winter camp at Brandy Station. The "esprit de Corps" was still strong for the Third Corps and

⁹²¹⁰¹R. Wayne Maney, Marching to Cold Harbor: Victory & Failure, 1864 (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane 1995) 191. Herein cited as Maney, Marching to Cold Harbor. William F. Fox, Regimental

⁹³ Losses in the American Civil War 1861-1865. A Treatise on the Extent and Nature of the
⁹⁴ Mortuary Losses in the Union Regiments with Full and Exhaustive Statistics Compiled from the
⁹⁵ Official Records on File in the State Military Bureaus and at Washington (Albany: Albany
⁹⁶ Publishing Co, 1889) 69.

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⁹⁸¹⁰²Maney, Marching to Cold Harbor,

the disbanding of the “Old Third” Corps led to more than a few vocal outcries by the men and officers of these regiments. During the encampment at Brandy Station five officers from the Eleventh New Jersey and one from the Sixteenth Massachusetts were court martialed on charges of holding a meeting to plan a mutiny against the disbanding of the Third Corps.¹⁰³ While this crisis eventually passed and these regiments took their place as members of the Second Corps, when Grant launched his offensive at the Wilderness the men of these regiments were still somewhat bothered by the whole affair. Francis Walker wrote in the history of the Second Corps that the grief and anger of the officers and men of the Third Corps at the dismemberment of that noble body of troops, with which they had been so proud, had not fully healed even by the close of the war. These feelings of grief and anger were no doubt further agitated when these veterans viewed themselves as sacrificial lambs at the hands of Grant.¹⁰⁴

For no explained reason the First Maine Heavy Artillery and the other regiments of the brigade did not directly participate in the offensive operations at Cold Harbor despite being at full strength. Instead, the brigade was put in a supporting role for the assault launched by other regiments in the Second and Fifth Corps. In this position the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery could only watch as thousands of their comrades were shot down and left were they fell.¹⁰⁵

Even though the First Maine Heavy Artillery was not heavily involved in any of the operations in and around Cold Harbor the regiment did not escape unscathed. The

99¹⁰³For more information on the see Frederick B. Arner, Mutiny at Brandy Station, The Last Battle of the
100 Hooker Brigade: A Controversial Army Reorganization, Court Martial, and the Bloody Days
101 that Followed (Kensington, MD: Bates and Blood Press, 1999).

102

103¹⁰⁴Walker, History of the Second Army Corps, 400.

regiment suffered twenty-five casualties including seven men from the regiment who were taken prisoner. None of the seven would survive their ordeal. Two of those who were captured and would later die in the Rebel prison pen of Andersonville were Francis and Frederick Philbrook, brothers from Prentiss, Maine.

Some of the other casualties suffered by the First Maine Heavy Artillery at Cold Harbor resulted from exploding shells that hit within the lines of the regiment, but a few casualties resulted from suspicious gunshot wounds to hands, fingers, and feet. To some soldiers in the First Maine Heavy Artillery these wounds, although painful, were less risky than the prospects of charging entrenched Confederate positions.

From their arrival on June 2 to their departure on June 12, 1864, the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery spent their time digging and re-digging trenches and rifle pits trying to stay out of harm's way. While at Cold Harbor on June 5th the men finally received their first mail since the regiment had left Washington on May 14th. To many, the first news from home was a welcome relief from the almost nonstop danger they faced since joining the Army of the Potomac.¹⁰⁶

Because many of the veterans troops at Cold Harbor were beginning to realize that it was hopeless to expect success from directly assaulting entrenched Confederate positions, some of the newer regiments of the Second Corps were expected to lead assaults against the Confederate lines. For the most part these newer regiments were the heavy artillery regiments that had come from the forts protecting Washington in the middle of May. Regiments such as the First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, the Second,

104¹⁰⁵Maney, Marching to Cold Harbor,

105¹⁰⁶Gilman, "Life in Virginia."

Seventh, and Eighth New York Heavy Artillery, were now spread throughout the different brigades of the Second Corps. At Cold Harbor, on more than one occasion, Heavy Artillery regiments were selected to lead the assaults against the Confederate lines. The logic behind this was simple. Getting these larger, fresher regiments to lead the way would hopefully be more successful and would give the Union Army an opportunity to take advantage of any breakthroughs gained by these regiments by following them up with veteran troops. It can be further assumed that getting these fresher troops to take the brunt of the assault, whether it was successful or not was more desirable than expending veteran troops who may have not been motivated to put out a complete effort in the first place. This is not to say the Heavy Artillery Regiments were deemed expendable, but because of their larger size and relative freshness they were seen as the best alternative in what could be best described as a forlorn hope.

A perfect example of this type of thinking by the commanders of the Second Corps was the assault by the Union Army on June 3, 1864. As a part of General Francis Barlow's First Division, Second Army Corps, the Seventh New York Heavy Artillery, which had at one time fought alongside the First Maine Heavy Artillery at Harris Farm and at Chesterfield Bridge, led its brigade in an assault of the Confederate line. Although still fairly new to the environment of active campaigning, the men of the Seventh New York Heavy Artillery, like the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, had already seen and experienced enough death and destruction to understand when they were being ordered into a difficult spot. Frank Wilkeson, an artillery man in the Second Corps, wrote that on the night before one of the assaults at Cold Harbor he found the men of the

Seventh New York Heavy Artillery “sad of heart. They knew that they were to go into the fight early in the morning, and they dreaded the work.”¹⁰⁷

Initially the Seventh New York Heavy Artillery was able to capture the first line of Confederate defenses, including a couple of cannons that the regiment turned upon the former owners. Despite these advantages, the tide started to turn as the expected support from the veteran troops in Barlow’s division never materialized. Soon the Seventh New York was overwhelmed by flanking cannon and musket fire. The former brigade mates of the First Maine Heavy Artillery were unable to hold their position and were violently swept back across the open ground between the two lines at a very heavy cost. The Seventh New York Heavy Artillery lost its leader, Colonel Morris, in the assaults as well as a number of other officers and men. During this same assault, the Eighth New York Heavy Artillery had led its brigade into the assault upon a different section of the Confederate line and suffered pretty much the same fate of heavy casualties, including the loss of its Colonel. Even the First Maine’s former Brigade Commander, Robert O Tyler, could not escape the butchery of Cold Harbor; he was severely wounded in one of the assaults. By the end of the battle the Union Army’s Second Corps lost 3510 men at Cold Harbor.¹⁰⁸

The First Maine Heavy Artillery had seen the destruction and the heavy losses suffered by other heavy artillery troops firsthand. While manning the entrenchments the men saw the hundreds of Union dead and dying still left on the battlefield. They heard the groans and cries of those too wounded to move that went on for days with no hope of

¹⁰⁶Wilkeson, Turned Inside Out, 128.

¹⁰⁷Walker, History of the Second Army Corps, 510 - 513,

being saved. It was enough to sour or disillusion the most hardened of veterans. The First Maine Heavy Artillery had yet to feel the full effect of this disillusionment, but the men of the regiment did know that Cold Harbor was a disaster that had hit their fellow Heavy Artillery men very hard. How this destruction and the subsequent disillusionment that seemed to grip the portions of the Army of the Potomac directly affected the First Maine Heavy Artillery is impossible to determine completely. After witnessing what happened at Cold Harbor, the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery had to wonder what would be in store for them. Private Peleg Bradford wrote to his mother, “this is a hard war, and I don’t know how it will turn.”¹⁰⁹

If Colonel Chaplin had any questions or doubts about how his regiment would be used in any upcoming action no expression of these thoughts has been found. Having served side by side with some of the regiments that had suffered tremendous casualties at Cold Harbor he must have at least realized that it would only be a matter of time before he and his men would be faced with a similar situation if Grant continued to fight a war of attrition. Regardless of whatever he may have thought, however, Colonel Chaplin would not let any degree of self doubt interfere with his responsibility to have his command ready to carry out the orders they were given. His military bearing and experience would not allow him to do anything else.

By the end of offensive operations at Cold Harbor thousands of Union Soldiers including over 3500 from the Second Corps alone had been sacrificed, yet no appreciable gains were made and Grant was finally forced to try to outflank Robert E. Lee’s Army again. This time Grant set his eyes upon the city of Petersburg, a major road and rail hub

108¹⁰⁹ Bradford, No Place,”

that kept the Confederate capital of Richmond fed and supplied. If one thing came out of the actions at Cold Harbor it was that both the veterans and now even the newer troops were beginning to see that with General Grant in command the price for victory would come at a high price and that they would have to pay the bill. As the Second Corps left Cold Harbor and tried to outrace the Confederates to the south, it was apparent that the once mighty corps was merely a shadow of its former self.

The Army of the Potomac was demoralized and had lost the fighting spirit it had exhibited so well at the Wilderness and Spotsylvania. According to one soldier the cause for this demoralization was twofold. One reason was the shirking generals who while ordering men into the slaughter stayed safely hidden behind the front lines. The second more devastating reason was the influx of low quality recruits who were more concerned with collecting bounties than winning the war. This observer specifically stated that these newer soldiers were not to be confused with the heavy artillery regiments, which he called some of the best troops in the army. Yet no matter how brave these heavy artillery or veteran troops were they relied on the soldiers on either side of them to stand with them until the end: "The brave soldier relies on his comrades to accompany him in the advance and to be by his side when slowly falling back before a superior force. It is essential that a soldier hears the voices of his comrades when he is charging."¹¹⁰

Even after witnessing the destruction of other regiments at Cold Harbor there was a relative feeling of confidence within the ranks of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. The disillusionment described by many other soldiers in the Second Corps did not seem to have as strong a grip on these men from Maine. Having been spared the destruction at

Cold Harbor, the regiment could still hold on to their feelings of duty, honor, and courage even after the “experience of the periphery.” While the First Maine Heavy Artillery only played a supporting role at Cold Harbor, it did witness the convulsion and disarray of war, with dead, dying, and wounded men, scarred trees and buildings, dead and maimed horses, and other debris of battle all around them. It was not easy for anyone not to be affected by these terrible sights. After almost two years under the disciplined leadership of Colonel Chaplin the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery still had a degree of faith in their cause and they felt confident that they could survive the upcoming battles alive. Private Asa Dore wrote to his wife, “we get along well, I don’t want you to worry about me, one bit for I have faith to believe that I shall come out of it safe and sound.”¹¹¹

Confidence alone would not be enough to keep the First Maine Regiment an effective fighting force. One advantage Colonel Chaplin had was that, even after the heavy losses at Harris Farm, his regiment was still relatively fresh compared to the veteran regiments that had been fighting since 1861. This freshness coupled with a sense of confidence inspired by faith in their Colonel and his leadership were important factors in keeping the fighting spirit of the First Maine Heavy Artillery high. Even after the hard battle at Harris Farm and the disaster that had befallen the rest of the Second Corps, the officers and the men still expressed a sense of confidence that was by most accounts lacking within many of the veteran regiments with the Army of the Potomac. Captain Frederick Carr Howes, the commander of Company H of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, expressed this confidence as he wrote that he was very pleased to see the

109¹¹⁰ Wilkeson, Turned Inside Out.

110¹¹¹ Asa Dore to Elizabeth Dore, June 9, 1864, Dore Family Letters.

confidence the men had in their leaders, “all feel that no mistakes will be made and though we must fight hard we can not help being successful.... everybody is in the best of sprits and with the help of God our country will be saved.”¹¹²

Still this sense of confidence did not completely overshadow the lessons learned from the disastrous charges at Cold Harbor. Captain Howes, while feeling that the Army could not help but be successful, hoped and prayed that when the First Maine Heavy Artillery was called upon to face the enemy that the decision will be to “besiege rather than storm the enemies works.”¹¹³

111¹¹² Frederick Carr Howes to Mary Abigail Howes, June 18, 1864. Letters of Frederick Carr Howes.

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113¹¹³ Frederick Carr Howes to Mary Abigail Howes, June 9, 1864. Letters of Frederick Carr Howes.

Chapter 8

Over the River an Opportunity Lost

After Cold Harbor a sense of disillusionment began to take hold in the Army of the Potomac. Commenting on the course of the Campaign, Colonel Theodore Lyman of Meade's staff complained, "there has been too much assaulting, this campaign!... The best officers and men are liable, by their greater gallantry, to be the first disabled." Gerald Linderman writes that as the soldiers became more experienced with the course of the war they gained a greater realization that the "rewards of courage were far less significant and the costs far higher than they had imagined and that the individual's powers of control were far feebler than they had supposed." In other words the soldiers who had been fighting the war since 1861 and 1862 were now beginning to realize that no degree of bravery or courage could protect them from the hard reality of war.¹¹⁴

It would be the sense of disillusionment, especially among the veterans of the Second Army Corps, that would bring the First Maine Heavy Artillery face to face with its own forlorn hope. Through a combination of disillusionment, well-prepared defenders, and uncoordinated operations, the First Maine Heavy Artillery was put in a situation that was as bad if not worse than what the Union troops faced at Cold Harbor. A retelling of the operations from June 12 through June 18, 1864, shows how a number of factors worked against the First Maine Heavy Artillery and brought them face to face with their bloody destiny.

114¹¹⁴Linderman, Embattled Courage, 158 -

On the night of June 12, 1864, the Union Army began its move south again. This time, instead of moving directly on Richmond, General Grant's plan was to capture the rail depot that kept Richmond supplied from all points in the South. The target was Petersburg, the convergence point for five major southern railroads that did their best to keep the Confederate capital and the Confederate Army protecting it supplied. On the night of June 12 the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery were allowed "just enough sleep" to get aggravated that they could not have more. They were ordered to turn out and begin the long march towards the James River.¹¹⁵

The First Maine Heavy Artillery, along with the rest of General Birney's Third Division of the Second Corps, crossed the broad James River on transport boats on June 14. The men from Maine made the crossing without incident, landing at Wind Mill Point. Upon crossing the James River, Major George Sabine commented in his diary on how the ravages of war had not fully affected this area of Virginia: "Country looking beautiful. Large crops of corn, wheat and oats. Don't know the enemy whereabouts exactly."¹¹⁶

At about 10 o'clock in the morning on June 15 the order was received for the First Maine Heavy Artillery to march on towards Petersburg. By noon the march had started and by the late afternoon the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery began to arrive in the vicinity of the City of Petersburg which would be where the regiment would fight, suffer, survive, and die for the next ten months.

Upon arriving at the outer defensive works of Petersburg, the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery and the other regiments in the Second Corps first spied the

¹¹⁵Gilman, "Life in Virginia."

¹¹⁶Raye, Island Sacrifice, 47.

elaborate and impressive defensive works the Confederates had built to defend the city of Petersburg. News had already started spreading that Union General William Smith's Eighteenth Corps, which was made up of a number of Black troops, had already pushed the Confederate defenders out of the first line of works. This news seemed to lift the spirits of the men. Upon hearing that black Union troops had met with initial success caused one First Maine Heavy Artillery soldier to comment "Bully for the Nig."¹¹⁷

The initial happiness of this early success would soon be overshadowed once these Union troops realized that capturing Petersburg would be like capturing a fortified citadel. Petersburg was primarily a walled city, a defensive tactic that had been used for centuries. As much as General Grant had realized the importance of capturing Petersburg, the Confederates had realized the importance of keeping it. The only thing the Confederates had failed to plan on in their defense of Petersburg was the quickness with which Grant would be able to get his army to the outskirts of the city. Without adequate numbers to man the defensive works, the walls, forts, and redans encircling the city were useless. The only question remaining when the Union Army arrived outside of Petersburg beginning on June 15 was which army would move faster. Could General Grant get his Union army into position before Robert E. Lee could get his veterans of the Army of Northern Virginia into the defenses surrounding Petersburg? Until Lee and his troops could arrive it would be up to Confederate General P.G. T. Beauregard to defend the city with the limited number of troops he had at his disposal. This would be difficult

¹¹⁷117 Gilman, "Life in Virginia."

considering that if Grant could get his army into position he outnumbered Beauregard's command by an estimated five to one.¹¹⁸

The biggest asset Beauregard had in trying to offset the numerical superiority of the Union Army was the complete nature of the fortifications that surrounded Petersburg. Frank Welcher, in his book on the Union Army, describes the defensive works surrounding Petersburg as follows.

The entrenchments at Petersburg encircled the town at a distance of about two miles; they consisted of a series of redans or batteries that were connected by infantry parapets. This line began on the Confederate left at the Appomattox River, near the mouth of Harrison's Creek, which was a little more than a mile downstream from Petersburg. From there it ran east about a mile to the City Point Railroad; then south for about three miles to the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad; then west for about four miles to a point one mile west of the Weldon Railroad; and from there it ran north and ended on the Appomattox River above Petersburg.¹¹⁹

There were no fewer than twenty-three redans or batteries, numbered sequentially starting from the east of Petersburg along the Appomattox River, all along the line to the west of Petersburg. These batteries helped strengthen this virtually solid line of entrenchments that ringed the City of Petersburg. The only weakness in the whole system was the lack of an adequate number of troops to prevent a determined enemy from breaking through. One unchecked breakthrough of this line by the Union Army would have given Grant the opportunity to capture Petersburg and hopefully end the war. All it would take would be the overall coordination amongst Grant's various Army Corps to launch a simultaneous assault along large portions of the line to further stretch

¹¹⁸Thomas J. Howe, The Petersburg Campaign: Wasted Valor June 15-18, 1864 (Lynchburg, VA: H.E.

¹¹⁹Howard, 1988) 136. Herein cited as Howe, Wasted .

¹²⁰¹¹⁹Welcher, The Union Army, 836 -

Beauregard's already thin line of troops to the breaking point. Unfortunately the coordination that was needed by the Union Army never materialized.

On June 14, General Winfield Scott Hancock, the commander of the Union Army Second Corps, failed to move his command in a timely manner in support of General Smith's Eighteenth Corps, which was already in position outside of Petersburg. One explanation for the delay was that Hancock had expected rations to be available for his troops as soon as they had crossed the James River at Wind Mill Point. The rations never came on June 14 nor on the morning of the June 15 and thus the Second Corps finally moved to support Smith's Eighteenth Corps mid morning on the June 15, without ever getting their rations. This eight-hour delay by the Second Corps would cost them dearly. On June 15 the Eighteenth Corps was able to capture a portion of the initial line of Confederate defenses. However, after the Confederates retired to a stronger second line of defenses the men of the Eighteenth Corps could not carry their success any further without more support. After a sixteen-mile march from Wind Mill Point to the outskirts of Petersburg, the Second Corps was not in position to support Smith's command "until after dark, too late to make Smith's partial success a complete one."¹²⁰

After arriving at the scene of the Eighteenth Corps' initial success, Colonel Chaplin ordered the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery to fall out and await further orders. Still without a supply of rations the men of the regiment did the best they could with what they had to overcome their pains of hunger. Sergeant Coffin and Private Howard Stratton pooled the meager remains of their rations, consisting of "a small part

121¹²⁰ Thomas Talbot, "A Balaklava of our Civil War; The Charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, June

122 18th, 1864" ts. Maine Historical Society, Portland, Maine. Herein cited as Talbot, "A

of one hardtack,” and “a small piece of pork” and to make a “Hungy-Gungy,” which they shared with Captain Smith.¹²¹

After this “banquet” was eaten Sergeant Coffin was ordered to command a detail of twelve to go out as a skirmish line. Coffin wrote that “just as we went over the breastworks, I noticed three dead Jonnies laying in a heap, that were killed the day before.” To the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery this was only the first of many instances where they would see the cold reality of “death in the trenches.” It would be an experience that would repeat itself many times over the course of the next ten months.¹²²

Out on the skirmish line, Sergeant Coffin was ordered to take his detail and advance about 200 yards towards the line of Confederate skirmishers. After moving ahead about 100 yards the skirmishers, of the First Maine Heavy Artillery were fired upon by their Confederate counterparts. The Maine skirmishers quickly sought cover behind some trees and returned fire. From this position Coffin observed the rest of the First Maine Heavy Artillery advance in line of battle across a field. They then halted, gave one volley to the Confederate skirmishers and then charged, driving the Confederates away. After this brief action the men of the regiment stopped and rested for the night in a nearby cover of woods.¹²³

This rest was needed because at 6:00 a.m. on the June 16, Birney’s Third division of the Second Corps was moved forward in a reconnaissance in force against the main Confederate line. This move and subsequent advances met with success as Birney’s men

123 Balaklava.”

124¹²¹Coffin, Three Years, 12 -13.

125¹²²Coffin, Three Years, 13.

126¹²³Coffin, Three Years,

were able to push the Confederate's even further back towards Petersburg. By the end of the day on the June 16, Birney's command including the First Maine Heavy Artillery were now in force in front of the O. P. Hare's House and the hill it sat on. Beauregard's forces had been pushed back all day, but still were able to prevent a significant breakthrough by the Union Army. By nightfall on June 16 the leading elements of Robert E. Lee's Army were just starting to reach Petersburg, but Beauregard realized that he could not expect that his second line of defense would hold another day under the pressure of three full-sized Union Army Corps that were threatening his front, so he had his engineers design and build additional sets of defensive lines closer to Petersburg.

As part of Gershom Mott's Brigade, the First Maine Heavy Artillery was heavily engaged on June 16. At 6:00 p.m. Mott's Brigade, along with another brigade in Birney's division moved to attack the Confederate line again. As one soldier in the First Massachusetts explained, "it was a magnificent sight to see long lines advancing with gleaming bayonets, even though to almost certain death." The entire attacking column was met with terrific musket fire, which stymied the advance. The result was a long drawn out fire fight between the two opposing lines that lasted until 10:00 p.m. that evening. The men of the First Maine, along with men from General Robert McAllister's New Jersey Brigade, in a forward position threw up rifle pits and laid in them all night. Later that night the ammunition needs of the New Jersey troops were supplied by details of the First Maine Heavy Artillery.¹²⁴

At daybreak on June 17 the First Maine Heavy Artillery was relieved from their forward position and ordered to fall back to a fairly sheltered area behind a hill. Here the

regiment received two days of rations and had time to catch their breath after being on the march or engaged with the enemy for two straight days. The First Maine Heavy Artillery remained in this protected position until it was ordered to move forward again, this time to a line of works that had been captured earlier in the day near Harrison's Creek. This position was greatly exposed and close to the Confederate line. While moving into position within these captured works, Private Peleg Bradford of Company F, First Maine Heavy Artillery, laid down and attempted to remove a small stone from inside his brogan. While doing this, he somehow managed to get his right knee above the protection of the entrenchment. The price for his quick moment of indiscretion was a Confederate minnie ball that crashed into his knee thanks to the efforts of a Confederate sharpshooter. Private Bradford wrote home on June 23 that he had lost his right leg but was getting along very well otherwise. After the war, Peleg Bradford figured that the Confederate sharpshooter was actually aiming for his head, so he figured that he had sacrificed his knee for his head which in his mind was a much better deal.¹²⁵

The Union army had proved it could overcome the lightly held defenses of the city, yet even with these initial successes there seemed to be no desire by the commanders of the Army to push on and further capitalize on the early advantage they had gained. The delay would be costly as more and more Confederate troops would find their way into the city and into the defenses surrounding Petersburg, making any further advances tougher and more deadly.

¹²⁷¹²⁴ Gilman, "Life in Virginia."

¹²⁸¹²⁵ Bradford, No Place,

Major George Sabine from Eastport, Maine, had joined the First Maine Heavy Artillery when the regiment was originally formed as the Eighteenth Maine in August 1862. He joined as a Captain, having raised and trained his own company from Eastport and the surrounding area. When the regiment arrived in Washington, Sabine quickly made an impression on his commanders, including Colonel Chaplin, for the way he took his responsibilities seriously and continually trained his men for the day they would be at the front. When the Eighteenth Maine was changed to the First Maine Heavy Artillery, Captain George Sabine was promoted to major and given command of one of the three battalions that made up the regiment. Major Sabine was well liked and respected by his men. On December 10, 1863, the respect that Major Sabine was held in by his men was exhibited by the presentation of a sword, sash, and belt that the men from Company K had bought for him. Rev. Henry C. Leonard, the regimental Chaplain, wrote that Major Sabine “had a rare combination of complete respect from both his command and his commanders. He was brave, bold and a skilled tactician.”¹²⁶

George Sabine had bravely led his men through the Battle of Harris Farm and through the storm of activity that marked the Union Army’s move south in the spring of 1864. The major wrote in his diary about the tremendous physical toll the overland campaign was having: “took up the line of march about 5 P.M.--Moved in South Westerly direction. Passed over ground scene of Gregg’s last cavalry fight. Arrived at camp ground about 11. Immediately commenced on fortifications. March all day work all

129¹²⁶Raye, Island Sacrifice, 32, 51.

night is the necessity now. This is certainly a life of activity. Sleep becomes the exception. We are certainly living a lifetime in these short weeks.”¹²⁷

On June 15 Major Sabine wrote that the First Maine Heavy Artillery, “remained near landing of last night until about 11, took up line of march. Marched until about midnight, a very severe and fatiguing march.” On June 16 and in the early morning hours of June 17, Major George Sabine wrote:

we are occupying first line of Rebel works in front of Petersburg captured yesterday from Rebels and pronounced to be very strong. Country looking beautifully. At sundown moved forward in line of battle, under heavy fire of enemy. Seeing under curve of hill, Col. McAllister and Jersey Regts in front, obliged to send them ammunition. Built a line of rifle pits. About daybreak withdrew front line, leaving only picket line in front. All day enemy sharpshooters very busy picking off our men. About noon was relieved with my battalion. Took position under brow of a hill. About sundown took up new positions in advance of rifle pits. No picket line in front.¹²⁸

While in this advanced position on June 17, 1864, the First Maine Heavy Artillery was engaged in a heavy but brief fire fight with their Confederate foes. Although brief, the fight was costly as Major George Sabine was wounded when a Confederate ball passed through his leg and lodged in the other one. He was removed to the division hospital in the rear and eventually returned to Maine. The major was never able to recover and died the following May after suffering terribly for almost a year. Major Sabine’s departure left a large void in a regiment that was still suffering from holes that had been created since the regiment first saw action on May 19. Once again, Colonel Chaplin saw one of his bravest and most respected officers fall. Even with the loss of one of his key

131¹²⁷Raye, Island Sacrifice, 44.

132¹²⁸Raye, Island Sacrifice, 49 -

subordinates Colonel Chaplin kept his command in good order and ready for whatever they would be called upon to do next.

The First Maine Heavy Artillery remained in this position all night until early in the morning of June 18 when at about 4:00 a.m. pickets from the regiment were sent forward only to discover that during the night the Confederates had retreated even closer to Petersburg and were now in a freshly prepared redoubt called Colquitt's Salient.

During the night of June 17 the sounds of trains could be heard coming into Petersburg. For the men of the Union army the sound only meant one thing: Robert E. Lee's army had finally made its appearance in full.

It was a dramatic turn of events from only three days before, when units of the Union 18th Army Corps, under General William F. "Baldy" Smith, arrived outside of Petersburg on June 15. The Confederate city was only lightly defended by Virginia militia and secondary troops. Called the Dimmock Line, this line of fortifications was the first of a series of earthen entrenchments and fieldworks meant to defend Petersburg. Even with all the disadvantages faced by the Confederate defenders at Petersburg, these troops were able to stall General Smith's advance long enough to allow for the building of more complete fortifications closer to city. For the next two days the defenders capitalized on the uncoordinated efforts of the Union Army. Through a series of miscommunications, confusion over the delivery of rations, and whole divisions of troops getting lost and misdirected, the Union Army Second Corps was unable to follow up and assist Smith's Eighteenth Corps. By daybreak on June 18, 1864, Robert E. Lee's veteran

troops began to arrive in Petersburg and the golden opportunity to capture the city with overwhelming force was lost.¹²⁹

Had a coordinated attack between the Second Corps and the Eighteenth Corps been successfully carried out only a few days earlier when most of Lee's army was still on route to Petersburg then it is quite possible that Petersburg would have fallen to Union forces in a day or two. The frustrating delays and the failure of Union commanders to capitalize on the opportunities available meant that the small number of Confederate forces defending Petersburg had time to be reinforced by the veterans of Lee's army.

By June 18 the disillusionment, especially in the Union Second Corps, that had begun to take hold at Cold Harbor was further progressed by the realization of the opportunity to capture Petersburg that had been lost between June 15 and 18. For three days the men of the Second Corps had assaulted the Confederate works but they were unable to force a significant breakthrough. Finally on the June 18, 1864, after several direct assaults had been repulsed with heavy loss did some veterans began to express their disillusionment by refusing to charge when they knew that the fully manned works to their front could not be captured by assault.¹³⁰

The failure to capture Petersburg further progressed the feeling of disillusionment within the ranks of the Union Army, especially among the veterans who had seen a number of their comrades sacrificed for no appreciable gains during Grant's Overland Campaign. Now instead of just individual men refusing to further participate in hopeless endeavors like charges against fortified positions, whole regiments were beginning to take

133¹²⁹Walker, History of the Second Army Corps, 524 - 538.

134¹³⁰Howe, Wasted Valor,

action on their disillusionment. By refusing to expose themselves to further risk, veteran regiments helped insure that the First Maine Heavy Artillery would be put into a position to bear the brunt of any further action against the Confederate positions protecting Petersburg. The inexperience of the First Maine Heavy Artillery kept them from realizing how their relative newness to the field would be used by the commanders of the Army of the Potomac to help offset these feelings of disillusionment amongst the veteran troops. The resulting consequences of this situation would set in motion one of the most devastating and destructive actions of the entire Civil War.

Chapter 9

A Burning, Seething, Crashing, Hissing Hell

In the late afternoon of June 18, 1864, after the outer defenses of Petersburg had been overrun during the previous three days of fighting, the First Maine Heavy Artillery was formed up to charge 300 yards across an open field and assault the fortified Confederate positions facing them at Hare House Hill. Previous attempts made earlier in the day by veteran regiments to carry this position had failed. By the time the First Maine Heavy Artillery was ordered to charge the entrenched positions, General Robert E. Lee's veteran troops had arrived in Petersburg, and they were ready to repulse any attack launched against them.

By the afternoon of June 18, with Lee's army in the trenches in front of Petersburg the situation was reminiscent to many Union veterans who had seen the same type of scenario at Cold Harbor earlier in the month. At Cold Harbor thousands of battle-tested veterans from the Union Second Corps had laid down their lives in a futile attempt to overrun the well-entrenched Confederate forces. General Grant's overland campaign not only took a heavy physical toll on the veterans of the Second Corps but also a mental one. Many of these veterans had been suffering the hardships of war since before the Battle of Antietam and had faithfully fulfilled their duties as soldiers. With Grant's willingness to continually engage the enemy with almost no break in the action, veterans were beginning to show a hesitancy in endangering themselves unnecessarily when ordered to charge strongly held fortifications. As one veteran of the 17th Maine wrote shortly after the disaster at Cold Harbor, "we were tired of charging earthworks. Many

soldiers expressed freely their scorn of Grant's alleged general ship, which consists of launching men against breastworks. It is well known that one man behind works is as good as three outside the works."¹³¹

What may have had the biggest negative impact on the military effectiveness of the veteran Second Corps was the loss in quality officers. Between May 4 and June 18, 1864, the Second Corps lost twenty brigade commanders, and, as General George Gordon Meade wrote to his wife, "we can not replace the officers lost with experienced men, and there is no time for reorganization or careful selection."¹³² This loss in experienced officers meant that many veteran regiments were being led by inexperienced and ineffective officers, which did nothing further to inspire confidence in the veterans of the Union Army's Second Corps.

The factors of ineffective leadership, physical exhaustion, and an unwillingness to be continually sacrificed culminated on June 18 in the outright refusal by many veteran units in the Second Corps to charge the Confederate positions once it became apparent that Lee's Army had arrived in Petersburg. A Union veteran wrote in his journal on June 18: "This morning we had them on the run and had we moved, Petersburg would have been ours. A goodly number of our men have fallen. I call it murder, for whoever ordered this halt is to blame for our predicament and now we were to be sent forward again, only to be hurled back torn and bleeding."¹³³ Looking 300 yards across an open field at the well-entrenched Confederate positions, another Union veteran in the Second Corps

¹³¹ Haley, Rebel Yell, 165.

¹³² Howe, Wasted Valor, 141.

¹³³ Haley, Rebel Yell, 173.

wrote : “Our men positively refused to attempt it and no urging to get them to make even a show of going” took place.¹³⁴

Early in the afternoon of June 18 General Birney, who was in command of the Second Corps due to the incapacity of General Hancock, ordered the Ninety-Third New York and the Eighty-Fourth and the One Hundred and Fifth Pennsylvania regiments to charge the Confederate positions facing them across from Hare House Hill. The Fifth Michigan, the First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, and the First Maine Heavy Artillery were ordered to be ready to support the charge if it was successful. Almost as soon as the order was made the veterans from New York and Pennsylvania protested by yelling that they were all played out and they urged Birney to “let the 1st Maine go.”¹³⁵

While the veteran troops claimed that they were all played out, the situation was somewhat different within the ranks of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. While the regiment had suffered heavily during the Battle of Harris Farm on May 19, the regiment had only seen limited action since then. The soldiers in the First Maine still did not know what to expect or what to make of their situation. One soldier in company G wrote on June 18, “we are under fire now every day but have got good luck. I think by the 4th of July that we shall march into Richmond safe and sound.”¹³⁶

In the late afternoon General Birney ordered General Mott to have his division attempt another charge. As Birney was commanding the Second Corps on June 18 he was receiving his orders directly from General Meade. Meade’s orders to Birney on the afternoon of June 18 were clear and direct. Meade’s orders stated: “I have sent positive

¹³⁴ Hess, Union Soldier in Battle, 88.

¹³⁵ Roe, First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, 181.

orders to Generals Burnside and Warren to attack at all hazards with their whole force. I find it useless to appoint an hour to effect cooperation, and am therefore compelled to give you the same order. You have a large corps, powerful and numerous, and I beg that you will at once, as soon as possible, assault in strong column. The day is fast going and I wish the practicability of carrying the enemy's line settled before dark."¹³⁷

In looking at the troops under his command, General Mott recalled that he knew the chances for success in charging the Confederates works were slim and that the veterans under his command would not be willing to try again. Mott wrote: "I knew that it was useless to expect suicide in mass from my old troops, who had seen the wolf and felt his teeth and bore his scars. Mott further explained that all he could hope was that a Heavy Artillery Regiment, like the First Maine "innocent of the danger it was to endure, would lead off with a dash, carry the works with a rush and then it was my duty to take care that old steady regiments were on hand ready to support, press and profit by any advantages won by the gallant forlorn hope."¹³⁸

When General Robert McAllister realized that his old brigade, now temporarily under the command of Colonel Daniel Chaplin of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, was being ordered to charge the same positions that McAllister's current command had failed to take earlier in the day, he remarked to his commander, "It is a death trap, a brigade can't live in there for five Minutes."¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Asa Dore to Elizabeth Dore, June 18, 1864, Dore Family Letters.

¹³⁷ House, "How the First Maine," 93.

¹³⁸ Gershom Mott to Frederick Low, May 23, 1871, Low Letters. ms. Folger Library, University of Maine. Herein cited as Low Letters.

¹³⁹ McAllister, Letters, 444.

McAllister wrote, “On reporting to General Mott, for orders I was ordered to place my brigade on reserve ready for action. I asked where is my old brigade and General Mott replied ‘just going in were you came out.’ I exclaimed God help them. He asked ‘why?’ I answered they cannot advance on those works--they cannot live. The . . . fire will cut and down.” McAllister stated that as soon as he finished his remarks an aide from higher headquarters rode up and gave the General the order to advance at once, and it was done. The First Maine Heavy Artillery was then ordered to step off and lead to another charge against the fortified Confederate positions at Colquitt’s Salient.¹⁴⁰

When it became apparent that the First Maine Heavy Artillery would be the vanguard of the assault, the men did not appear to be visibly affected, yet the forced smiles and light remarks betrayed an underlying feeling of nervousness within the ranks. For the most part the men of the First Maine kept themselves busy as they smoked their pipes, wrote letters, played cards, looted the Hare House, and worked with picks and shovels to further strengthen the Union line. They did all of this as periodic shells, minnie balls, and other deadly missiles flew through the air, sometimes randomly, other times more deliberately.

Sometime around 5:00 p.m. the First Maine Heavy Artillery and the supporting regiments of the division, the Ninety-Third New York, the Eighty-Fourth and the One Hundred and Fifth Pennsylvania, the Fifth Michigan, the Seventh New Jersey, the Sixteenth Massachusetts, and the First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery were formed behind the main Union line in a small clearing that was concealed from the Confederate

¹⁴⁰Robert McAllister, Letter to Frederick Low, January 14, 1871. Low .

line by a small cover of woods to the right of Hare House Hill.¹⁴¹ Some men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery thought the move meant that the regiment was being relieved and that the assault was being put off. While the men may have thought they were being removed from the danger, some of the officers knew that the relief was only temporary. The Adjutant of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, Lieutenant James W. Clark, paced back and forth in front of the regiment. When he was asked by one of the captains what this movement to the rear meant he replied, “We are all gone to hell,” and with that he proceeded to pass his canteen to his fellow officer and asked the captain to take something to help take the edge off. The captain replied, “No thank you, if I am going to hell, I’m going to do it sober.”¹⁴²

In planning for the attack on the Confederate line opposite Hare House Hill it was decided that the First Maine Heavy Artillery, because of its size, would be divided into three battalions. Due to the illness of Lt. Colonel Thomas Talbot, overall command of the regiment fell to Major Russell B. Shepard. Major Shepard would lead the First Battalion, Major Christopher Crossman would lead the Second Battalion, and the Third Battalion would be commanded by Captain Whitting J. Clark. Major George W. Sabine would have commanded one of the battalions on the 18th, but his wounding the day before deprived the regiment of his leadership.

¹⁴¹ US War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Washington, DC, 1880-1901. Series I, Volume XL(1), S#80, 418.

Herein cited as OR.

¹⁴² Charles J. House. “The First Maine Heavy Artillery, This is Positively True, Major House Tells of Its Awful Losses in the Civil War. 1204 During One Month. The Death Record Greater Than That of Any Other Regiment in the Federal Army” (Kennebec Journal, ts. ed. Virginia T. Merrill. nd. np.)

Each battalion of the First Maine Heavy Artillery was formed in a battle line of companies, two ranks deep. The goal of the First Battalion was to clear away any obstacles and abatis that would hinder the attacking column. The Second Battalion, following twenty to thirty yards behind, planned to surge through the paths cleared by the Shepherd's Battalion and hit the Confederate line head on. The Third Battalion's responsibility was to further press the attack and hold on to any advantage long enough for other units of the Third Division to push forward and further secure any breakthrough in the Confederate line.¹⁴³

Sometime after 5:00 p.m. while the heat and humidity of the day was still raging, the First Maine Heavy Artillery was brought forward to the front of the Union line. The First Maine relieved the Fifty-Seventh Pennsylvania, and was placed in line along the Prince George County Road. The veterans from Pennsylvania, who had been ordered to charge earlier in the day, and who had found a ditch and laid down until the firing ceased, were moved back to the rear.¹⁴⁴

As the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery waited, they could easily view the Confederate line across the open field. For the most part, the guns on the Confederate side were silent, while the Sixth Maine Battery positioned on Hare House Hill slightly behind and to the left of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, shelled the entrenched Confederates.¹⁴⁵

9¹⁴³ Coates, "The Bloody First Maine." 36 & 45.

10¹⁴⁴ James M. Martin, History of the Fifty-Seventh Regiment Pennsylvania Veteran Volunteer Infantry (Kearny, NJ: Belle Grove Publishing Company, Reprinted 1995) 121.

12¹⁴⁵ James Rhodes, "The Sixth Maine Battery Before Petersburg," Maine Bugle (Rockland) 1 (1894).

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Soon after the First Maine was positioned along the Prince George County Road, Major J.W. Starbird of the Nineteenth Maine, serving on General Mott's staff relayed the order to advance to Colonel Chaplin. As Brigade commander Colonel Chaplin issued the orders to Majors Shepherd and Crossman and to Capt. Clark. Chaplin told his three officers, "We have orders to charge those works immediately. Go in light marching order with bayonets fixed."¹⁴⁶

As the order to advance was made known to the officers and to the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, they were instructed to make final preparations. Orders were given to load, cap, and fix bayonets. Further orders were given to each company to pile their knapsacks in the road, leaving two men from each company to guard them. Apparently the officers of the First Maine had learned well from their experience at the Battle of Harris Farm, where their unguarded possessions fell easy victim to the veteran troops of the Second Army Corps. Almost as soon as the guards from each company were selected they immediately became busy, writing down the names and addresses of their comrades' loved ones back in Maine. As the minutes ticked by, the nerves of those ready to make the charge could be seen visibly tightening as caps were pulled down and adjusted, teeth were clenched firm, and muskets were held as tight as ever.

While the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery waited for the final order the Confederates across the open field, within the fortified positions, also waited. Both sides could see each other and both waited for the coming storm to break. On the Confederate side regiments of Colquitt's, Hagood's, and portion's of Gracie's brigade -- all hardened veteran units of Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia -- waited for the First Maine

14¹⁴⁶ Henry Sellers, "Did Colonel Chaplin Offer His Sword?" Maine Bugle (Rockland) 7 (1894) :

Heavy Artillery to advance. Under a threat of being shot on the spot, officers in Hagood's brigade were told to make sure their men did not open fire until ordered to do so.¹⁴⁷

Finally, after minutes that must have seemed like hours, the First Maine Heavy Artillery was called to attention and made ready to advance. Following the orders passed down to him from Colonel Chaplin and in compliance with orders that had come down from General Meade, Major Russell B. Shepard, a burley bearded school teacher from Skowhegan, Maine, stepped to the front of the regiment and bellowed out to his command "Attention First Maine, Forward at the Double Quick, Charge."¹⁴⁸

With this order all three battalions rushed forward, climbing over the embankment of the Prince George County Road out into open field. As soon the First Maine cleared the road and started their advance, supporting regiments in the rear and to either flank were supposed to move forward. While a few portions of these supporting regiments took a couple of steps forward, most of these soldiers just lied down and refused to advance. When the order was given for the First Maine Heavy Artillery to advance, they essentially did so alone. Captain Thomas C. Thompson of the Seventh New Jersey wrote in his report, "The Sixteenth Massachusetts failed to follow the First Maine, where upon Major Cooper ordered the regiment (the Seventh New Jersey) forward, but not being properly supported did not advance beyond the Hare House."¹⁴⁹ As the veterans saw the

15¹⁴⁷ William M. Thomas, "The Slaughter at Petersburg, June 18, 1864," Sunday News (Charleston, SC) 25

16 July 1897: 1. Herein cited as Thomas, "The Slaughter at Petersburg."

17¹⁴⁸ Coates, "The Bloody First Maine," 41.

18¹⁴⁹ OR. Series I, Volume XL(1), S#80, 418.

First Maine Heavy Artillery moving forward, they urged them to lie down and seek cover because they had no hope of taking the Confederate positions.¹⁵⁰

Encouraged by Major Russell B. Shepherd, and urged on by their other officers, the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery did not lie down and instead they continued to move forward. First Sergeant Charles Coffin described the scene:

We could see by looking over the embankment of the road a cleared field in front and on the further edge of the field a line of breastworks about 300 yards away. There was a large brick house on the left side about halfway across the field. We could plainly see that the breastworks were occupied by men and cannon, and we were informed that we had been ordered to assault and take the breastworks. I think everyone present realized the hopelessness of the undertaking, but it is a soldier's duty to obey orders, and when Colonel Chaplin from his station in front rang out the order "First Maine Forward Charge", we sprang forward with a cheer upon what we all knew was a forlorn hope, and as soon as we showed ourselves out of the sunken road the Johnnies opened on us with musketry and artillery. That field became a seething hell. Our supports on the right and on the left recoiled and refused to go. We were left entirely alone to receive the fire.¹⁵¹

As the regiment started to move forward Sergeant Charles C. Morse of Company L yelled out to his men, "Boys, put your cartridge boxes around in front so the Rebs can't hit you below the belt."¹⁵²

Without the veterans behind them, the Maine men found themselves charging the Confederate positions alone and thus becoming the only targets the Confederates had. The First Maine Heavy Artillery ran headlong into a wall of shell, flame, and lead. Previously unnoticed Confederate batteries loaded with double-shotted canisters poured their deadly missiles into both flanks of the regiment.

19¹⁵⁰ Bruce Catton, A Stillness at Appomattox (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1954) 198.

20¹⁵¹ Coffin, Three Years, 14.

21¹⁵² Alley, "It Was a Fearful

Charles J. House recalled how the First Maine came to lead the charge and why the regiment did so alone:

Our Third brigade was designated to make the direct assault and the other brigades were well in hand to follow up any advantage that we might possibly gain. The different regiments composing the brigade were withdrawn from the line and brought together a little to the rear under cover of the woods and then marched back into position in column in an open pine growth back from the road, so we should just clear the Hare house on the right as we advanced. As we came into position we found that our regiment not only headed the column, but we had been made a column of ourselves by breaking up into three battalions of four companies each and, according to our instructions, the First battalion was to lead off, and each succeeding battalion to follow at a distance of twenty paces. In short the First Maine Heavy Artillery became the strong column with which the assault was made for no other regiment advanced beyond the road, It was just as well , for no ten thousand men in column could have pierced that line manned as it was with infantry and artillery. The more to advance the more to be killed, that was all. There was lead and canister enough to spare.¹⁵³

The Confederates, although excited and nervous as they saw the large blue column of the First Maine Heavy Artillery move forward, remained in control and adhered to the orders of their officers as they calmly directed each rank to “ready, aim, fire and reload.” As William M. Thomas, a South Carolinian from Hagood’s brigade, recalled “upon each order to fire, 250 Enfield rifles” from his regiment let loose their leaden missiles at the same time. Numerous times the Confederates were put through the manual of arms as they continued to volley fire by rank in hopes of repelling the advancing Heavy Artillery from Maine.¹⁵⁴

The withering fire from the Confederate muskets and cannon quickly began to take its toll on the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. Sergeant Charles Coffin of

22¹⁵³House, “How the First Maine,” 93 - 94.

23¹⁵⁴Thomas, “The Slaughter at

Company H was in a position that brought him directly behind the colors of the regiment, which slapped him in the face. By his account he was in the vortex of the fire and was hit in the right hip during the first volley. He fell forward and remained unconscious on the battlefield until just before sunset. When Sergeant Coffin came to, he was very thirsty and managed to quickly drain his canteen and then crawl towards a small tree that was the only source of cover near him. In the process Coffin was hit again, this time in his left leg. He remained still for the rest of the afternoon until darkness came and he was rescued from the field.¹⁵⁵

Canister, shot, and shell slammed into the ranks of the First Maine, punching holes into the once solid line of blue. As one soldier described, “the canister would sweep a whole line and the line just back of it closed up and went forward.” The number of killed and wounded within the first few minutes was unprecedented. Numerous men fell, some killed instantly, some mortally wounded and even more were wounded to some degree or another. One of those killed was Sergeant Morse who reportedly died from one of the same wounds he had urged his men to protect themselves from.¹⁵⁶ Private Asa Dore of Company G, who had joined the regiment with his son Frank, was killed on June 18 after writing to his wife earlier in the day that he believed that by July 4 he would be marching through the streets of Richmond with his regiment. Asa’s son Frank also of Company G did not know what had become of his father and after the charge he speculated that his father was either killed, wounded, or taken prisoner, as he wrote home

24¹⁵⁵Coffin, Three Years, 15.

25¹⁵⁶Alley, “It Was a Fearful Charge.”

to his mother that he had been wounded in three places himself.¹⁵⁷ Private Walter S. Gilman of Company D was hit in the left leg and left arm and laid out on the field until darkness allowed him to move back to the Union lines. Private Elias K. Porter of Company B survived the charge only to make it close enough to the Confederate line to be taken prisoner. He died at Andersonville in the fall of 1864.

“There is no battle or charge made in the war of the rebellion that is more indelibly stamped in my mind than this charge,” wrote General Robert McAllister in 1886. McAllister readily compared the charge to the equally deadly “charge of the Light Brigade,” stating both were the results of “uncalled for orders, orders which should never have been given.”¹⁵⁸

For many of the Union Soldiers who witnessed the charge the scene of destruction was indescribable. As these soldiers stood and watched the destruction of the First Maine Heavy Artillery there was not anything they could have done short of putting themselves in great peril. Years later the events they witnessed on June 18th were still vivid in their memory. One historian of the Twelfth New Jersey wrote:

Next day on the 18th we moved up to the Hare House. Where we lay in the road and witnessed that famous charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery as they advanced about 150 yds in open field in front of us and hurled back with the greatest regimental loss known during the war. More than 600 of their men went down on that little plot of about two acres, 200 being instantly killed and their bodies lay as thick as shears of grain in a harvest field, while the survivors came limping and crawling back, shot, torn and mangled beyond description.¹⁵⁹

26¹⁵⁷ Frank Dore to Elizabeth Dore, Dore Family Letters.

¹⁵⁸ Robert McAllister, Letter to Charles Hamlin, October 16, 1886, McAllister Letters, ms. Rutgers University Library, New Brunswick, NJ.

¹⁵⁹ William P. Haines, History of the Men of Company F with Descriptions of the Marches and Battles of the 12th New Jersey Volunteers (Mieklton, NJ,

Ranks upon ranks of men from the First Maine Heavy Artillery fell as hundreds if not thousands, of deadly pieces of metal slammed into the column. Yet as the destruction kept raining down upon them the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery kept moving forward towards the Confederate works. Captain F. A. Cummings of Company M, in an interview after the war, said:

Men were shot dead within the first five feet. The crash of two thousand muskets rent the air as a long line of flame leaped from the works in our front, and the well known yell of the Army of Northern Virginia mingled with the roar of Rebel batteries on our right and left as their canister followed the musket balls of the infantry and tore enormous gaps in our ranks. The First Battalion melted away before this fire and lay in a heap, officers and men except now and then a scattering one who had miraculously escaped. Before the Second or Third Battalion reached its place the regimental formation had been almost obliterated, and two-thirds of the First Maine lay stricken upon the field. Still without firing a gun, but in blind obedience to orders, the remnant struggled on toward the pitiless line of fire that never once ceased or slackened. The reader will understand that [the] regiment was alone.¹⁶⁰

What kept the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery moving forward under such an onslaught? As one soldier recalled, the fact that the regiment kept moving forward even as it was being cut to pieces was not because of bravery alone. Private Alley wrote, “Well, you may talk about heroes and all that, but I do believe that in a fight like that, where men are dropping all around you, the only thing that keeps you from running right off is pride, You just say to yourself. ‘Now I won’t run until John Brown does, and that is sure’ and so you stay in.” This survivor of the First Maine continued by writing that “there was very little bravery in trying to stem that tide of lead and fire, and that the men

³ ¹⁶⁰ Captain G.L. Kilmer, “Carnage in First Maine Heavy Artillery,” Confederate Veteran 16 (1908) : 646.
⁴ Herein cited as Kilmer, “Carnage in First Maine Heavy Artillery.”

did not stand it long. We went within thirty feet of the earthworks, and one man crossed, and fell dead on the other side.”¹⁶¹

The remaining portions of the First Maine Heavy Artillery had advanced to about 30 feet from the Confederate works when they were finally forced to give way and retreat back towards the relative safety of the Union lines. As they did they were peppered with Confederate shot and shell. After the devastating charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery had failed, direct assaults against entrenched Confederate positions at Petersburg made way for a series of movements in which General Grant’s forces attempted to outflank Lee’s works in his attempt to cut the vital Confederate supply lines. What had appeared as an almost sure victory on June 15 would now turn into a drawn-out series of operations that would last almost ten months.

Years later, General Mott, who had ordered Chaplin’s Brigade into the fray, recalled the charge in heroic terms: “they made their burst, 950 strong, and surged forward against the rebel lines, like a blue wave, deeply, darkly, beautifully blue, crested with a glistening foam of steel . . . but they could not attain the barrier before them, and submitted like heroes to the tempest of canister balls and Bullets.”¹⁶²

Another account also pointed to the heroic nature of the charge, stating: “when the historian of the war shall seek an instance of noble daring, and unflinching bravery, let him point to the memorable charge of the First Maine, on the 18th of June, 1864.”¹⁶³

⁵¹⁶¹ Alley, “It Was a Fearful Charge.”

¹⁶² Robert Goldthwaite Carter, Four Brothers in Blue or Sunshine and Shadows of the Great War of the Rebellion: A Story of the Great Civil War from Bull Run to Appomattox (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1978) 434. Herein cited as Carter, Four Brothers.

¹⁶³ Carter, Four Brothers, 435.

Although the charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery may have been brave, it was far from the ideal ocean vista that General Mott had described it. Horace Shaw, in the original regimental history, described the charge as a “burning, seething, crashing, hissing hell.”¹⁶⁴

Hundreds of soldiers from the First Maine were wounded but would be able to return to duty after a short period of recuperation. Countless others would never return to the ranks and would bear their scars for the rest of their lives. A contributor to the history of the First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery wrote that some years after the war he saw “a big man from Maine,” who had been in the charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery and “who had seven bullet holes in him, one of which was through the throat so that he was unable to speak, but he survived and a few years later was peddling confectionery on the muster field at Concord, minus an arm, breathing through a tube.” Pension Records, although not conclusive, indicate that this surviving veteran was Private Winthrop Shirland of Company I from Winslow, Maine, who had joined the regiment as a 19-year-old recruit in November of 1863. One reading of Shirland’s pension record and the description of his wounds causes one to question how any man could have survived this action. In 1867 an examining surgeon wrote of Shirland’s wounds: ¹⁶⁵

One ball entered palm right hand and came out near right elbow, one ball passed through right arm at middle third (of the) humerous, at or near which point the right arm is amputated. One ball passed through the right leg near middle third, rendering the leg quite lame and weak, one ball entered top left of shoulder and emerged near base of scapula (collar bone), badly fracturing that bone, causing loss of many fragments of bone impairing use of left arm to great extent. One ball struck left wrist, (a pistol ball) which now remains beneath the skin on back of wrist, now

¹⁶⁴ Shaw, The First Maine Heavy Artillery, 122.

¹⁶⁵ Roe, The First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, 181-

attended with much inconvenience. One ball entered right side of throat and forced it's way into the mouth where it escaped. Says he took cold, when diphtheria set in causing the throat to fill up to such a degree that an incision was made in the trachea just above the top of the sternum, where a silver tube is inserted to breath through. Just enough breath can be forced through the larynx to enable him to articulate, though very indistinctly. Says cord which holds the tube in occasionally allows it to slip out, and that he is unable to replace it himself, as he has but one hand and that is very much disabled. Therefore [it is] necessary that someone should be near him constantly. This is very dangerous and uncomfortable. He is unable to perform any manual labor and requires constant aid of another person. I consider him entitled to a pension of \$25 dollars per month if any man ever was.¹⁶⁶

Among the wounded were all three battalion commanders. Major Shepard, who was hit in the stomach, but saved from severe injury by his belt buckle.¹⁶⁷ Major Crossman was wounded in the right arm with the bullet passing clean through. This wound left his arm useless and according to the examining surgeon made him two-thirds disabled and entitled to a pension. According to Crossman he was not expected to live on account of his wound and a resulting high fever, but by September he had almost fully recovered from the fever but was left with a useless right arm.¹⁶⁸ Captain Whiting S. Clark was shot down and carried from the field in what appeared to be a dying condition. He was suffering from three wounds, one bullet passed through his left side, one through his forearm and a third was lodged in his left arm pit. Captain Clark survived but suffered constant discomfort from his wounds until he died in 1904 in Des Moines, Iowa.¹⁶⁹

2 ¹⁶⁶Pension Record of Winthrop Shirland, ms. Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, DC.

3 ¹⁶⁷Shaw, The First Maine Heavy Artillery, 455.

4 ¹⁶⁸Christopher Crossman, Letter to WS Clark, September 9, 1864. ms. Correspondence of the First Maine

5 Heavy Artillery, Maine State Archives, Augusta, Maine.

6 ¹⁶⁹Pension Records of Christopher Crossman and WS Clark, ms. Record Group 94 National Archives,

7 Washington, DC; State of Maine Adjutant General Report for 1864 and 1865 (Augusta, ME:

8 1866)

Adjutant James W. Clark, who had nervously paced before the regiment advanced, was severely wounded in the right arm. He was sent to the army hospital on Davis Island in New York harbor. After being in the hospital for three weeks his arm was amputated and he died of surgical complications on July 31, 1864. Captain Samuel Daggett of Company B was also wounded on June 18. He was wounded in the knee at the very moment he was drawing his pistol. Being unable to walk, he crawled towards the rear. After crawling only a little way he was shot in the face, yet he continued to crawl to the rear. Soon some Confederates came out of their works after the charge had been repulsed and reportedly Daggett was shot again in the knee. Daggett was losing so much blood from his wounds that he went in and out of consciousness. When he came to, he cast off his sword and rubber blanket and crawled until he finally made it to a small gully that was already the refuge for other survivors of the charge. Finally, under cover of darkness, Daggett was carried to a field hospital on the back of a corporal. Captain Daggett was eventually transported to Davis Island Hospital, where he died on July 1, 1864 at the age of 23 years.¹⁷⁰

There were three flags carried into the charge by three sergeants, with six corporals acting as color guards. Of the nine members of the color guard, seven were shot down and one corporal was killed. Corporal William K. Nason of Company B was shot nine times, including twice in the leg when he took up carrying a flag forward after its original bearer had been wounded. Corporal Nason was found on the field severely wounded but still had the flag within his grasp.¹⁷¹

⁹¹⁷⁰ State of Maine Adjutant General's Report for 1864 and 1865 (Augusta, ME, 1866) 348.

¹⁰¹⁷¹ Kilmer, "Carnage in the First Maine Heavy Artillery," 646.

Another color Sergeant, John Ames of Company G, was one of the last men that turned to retreat from the field on June 18, 1864. When Ames went to turn back he saw only one of his comrades near him. Before he turned to retreat from the field, this young soldier deliberately dropped to his knee aimed and fired at one of the rebel artillerymen. After he fired, Ames and the unidentified soldier both turned and ran back towards the Union lines. They only made it a few feet when a Confederate battery opened up and threw both of the men into the air. In the resulting smoke and confusion Ames lost sight of the boy. When Ames cleared his head, he checked himself out and finding he was unhurt, he quickly escaped to the safety of the Union lines.¹⁷²

The effect of the charge on the men of the First Maine was profound beyond the physical and emotional toll it took. The charge had the immediate effect of bringing about a sense of disillusionment within the ranks of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. Private John Steward from Company A wrote to his wife a few days after the charge and urged his son not to consider joining the army:

if he can stay at home he may consider himself a lucky boy. He can try picture to himself the horrors and hardships of war in its worst form that imagination can picture it and he will fall far short of reality. I do not want you to think that I am not as much of the union man as ever, but to witness such slaughter and butchery of human beings is awful to look upon. Take our regiment for example. We started with nineteen hundred strong now we muster only about three hundred. A great many of the new regiments that came out when we did fared no better. I know it makes me sick of the war.¹⁷³

An examination of the casualty list for June 18, 1864, tells the story in vivid detail. According to the records compiled by Charles J. House and Horace Shaw for the

11¹⁷²“Record of Company G.”

original regimental history, in less than ten minutes the First Maine Heavy Artillery suffered 615 casualties. As the table below illustrates the charge was nothing short of slaughter.¹⁷⁴

Table 1: Company Casualties June 18, 1864

	Killed & Mortally Wounded	Wounded	Total
Field and Staff	1	3	4
Company A	14	34	48
Company B	30	31	62
Company C	22	20	42
Company D	27	26	53
Company E	15	24	39
Company F	15	38	53
Company G	24	50	74
Company H	24	32	56
Company I	23	22	45
Company K	10	40	50
Company L	26	30	56
Company M	11	22	33
Total	242	372	615

According to Fox's Regimental Losses the First Maine Heavy Artillery suffered one of the highest percentage killed in a single action on June 18 with 22 percent of those engaged killed or mortally wounded. Overall according to Shaw the regiment suffered an estimated 71 percent casualty rate on June 18. Add to these results the 594 casualties suffered by the First Maine Heavy Artillery before the regiment arrived at Petersburg and one quickly gets a sense of the savage nature of General Grant's overland campaign in the

¹⁷³ John Steward, Letter to Abby Steward, June 27, 1864, John Steward Letters.

spring of 1864. Only the overall size of the First Maine Heavy Artillery kept the regiment from ceasing to exist as an independent military organization. By the end of the day on June 18, 1864, the regiment that once had veteran soldiers asking what division this was, was now a mere skeleton of what it had once been. As the veterans of the Second Corps had warned, General Grant had cut them down to size.¹⁷⁵

Almost as soon as the charge had been repulsed and the survivors returned to their camps, the battle to record and assign blame for the charge began. Indications that Colonel Chaplin was personally moved by the destruction of his regiment were immediately evident. The results of the charge were devastating. Colonel Chaplin, who had command of the brigade and had passed Mott's order on to his regiment, watched in horror as the men he had commanded since the summer of 1862 were slaughtered before his eyes. According to some accounts, after seeing his men butchered as a result of the orders he had given them, Chaplin stormed up to the collected officers of the division including General Gershom Mott and bitterly protested the fact that his regiment had been butchered and wasted following orders while the same veteran regiments that had ridiculed the First Maine laid down and did not advance. With tears in his eyes he exclaimed to Mott, "here take my sword, I have no more use for it now." He pointed to the ground between the lines where the wounded and dead of the First Maine Heavy Artillery still lay upon the field. He yelled, "There is my regiment lying on that field." There is no record of a response from Mott.¹⁷⁶

¹ ¹⁷⁴ Shaw, The First Maine Heavy Artillery,

² ¹⁷⁵ Fox, Regimental Losses, 29. Shaw, The First Maine Heavy Artillery, 472.

¹⁷⁶ Joel Brown, "The Charge of the Heavy Artillery," Maine Bugle 1 (Rockland, 1894). Herein cited as Brown, "The Charge of the Heavy Artillery."

There were no repercussions for regiments that failed to charge with the First Maine. The veteran regiments had seen their share of death and destruction and, based on a sense of disillusionment with how they were being used, simply refused to move. A veteran soldier from Maine expressed his frustration with the course of the war by cursing the commanders of the Union Army. He called the delay in taking Petersburg the previous day “murder” as now the Confederates had completed their defensive preparations and he knew that if his regiment was sent forward again they would only be “hurled back, torn and bleeding.”¹⁷⁷

There were similar feelings throughout the other regiments of the Second Corps and based on General Mott’s statement after the war, which was cited earlier, he knew his veteran regiments especially those who suffered heavily at Cold Harbor were not willing to be sacrificed again. Even those regiments who had not suffered that heavily at Cold Harbor and were as relatively inexperienced as the First Maine refused to charge. Case in point was the First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery. They were ordered to support the First Maine but instead they heeded the advice of the veteran troops and dropped to the ground. While this regiment may not have directly borne the scars of Cold Harbor they had seen the destruction that had befallen their comrades in other regiments and knew a bad situation when they saw one. An artillery man from New York wrote that “enlisted men who passed unharmed through the frightful carnage, judged the losses the army suffered by the actual losses that had occurred in regiments with which we were familiar” and no doubt the same could be said for both the veteran and non-veteran troops that refused to charge with the First Maine Heavy Artillery. Call it disillusionment, call it self-

¹⁷⁷ Haley, The Rebel Yell.

preservation, or the fear of dying alone and far from home, these regiments refused to move when ordered. These men had enough experience watching their regiments dwindle in size to that “of a battalion, then a company, and sometimes a platoon,” and they were even more disillusioned by the oppressive “consciousness of those who had been lost.” The fact that there was no action taken against the men or the officers of the regiments that refused to charge only further highlights the fact that the commanders knew and even accepted the fact that they could not expect their men to continue to sacrifice themselves in attempt to carry out the impossible.¹⁷⁸

After the assault of the First Maine had been repulsed only those not wounded or slightly wounded were able to escape the field. They represented the broken remnants of what had once been a regiment of 900 men. A large part of the regiment was still on the field either dead or, worse, yet wounded and unable to remove themselves from the no man’s land between the two entrenched lines due to their incapacity or because anyone who moved came under fire from the Confederate defenders.

According to Shaw, when night fell on the June 18 a dense mist and fog settled over the field, which allowed some of the less seriously wounded to crawl off the field and back into the Union lines. The darkness and mist also provided enough cover for comrades of the wounded to attempt to rescue those still on the field. The rescue attempts went on all night and into the gray dawn of the morning of June 19.

In the early morning fog, one rescue party made up of Horace Shaw and Lt. James A. Dole of Company D went out searching for Lt. Gardner Ruggles of Company F and other members of the regiment who were believed to be wounded not far from the

¹⁷⁸Wilkerson, Turned Inside Out, 182, Linderman, Embattled Courage, 246,

enemy's line. Under great peril the search party advanced out between the lines in hopes of finding Lt. Ruggles. Suddenly the fog lifted and the search party came under enemy fire. Shaw, Dole, and the others of the party were forced to drop down onto the field and seek cover amongst the piles of dead until they worked up the courage to make a perilous run towards the Union lines.

Colonel McAllister wrote to his wife after seeing the charge,

there are plenty of dead lying unburied on the field between the lines. No Party dare touch them. Our extension last night enabled us to reach some of them, others the Rebels would not let us touch. No doubt we will ask for a flag of truce today. The wounded of my brigade were gotten off night before last. But I am sorry to say that such was not the case with my old Brigade, who made the charge in the evening. Those men are still suffering on the field. The heavy loss was... principally among the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery. That regiment was as large as the balance of the brigade, and it was their first charge. They went further than any of the other regiments and suffered more than other regiments did. Poor fellows, lying two nights and one day without food and water.¹⁷⁹

For two nights and a day the wounded of the First Maine Heavy Artillery laid on the field amongst their dead comrades. William A. Day, of Company I of the Forty-Ninth North Carolina, wrote that on the morning of June 20 his regiment was moved into Colquitt's Salient and that Union dead that "had not been buried but lying in the hot sun," had "begun to smell so badly we could hardly stand it." Day further explained that because of the continual fire of artillery and sharpshooters from both sides, the Union troops could only sneak out at night to bury their dead and retrieve their wounded.¹⁸⁰

Immediately after the charge the few acres of ground over which the Regiment had charged was literally covered with the fallen men of the Regiment. A few were unhurt,

³ ¹⁷⁹McAllister, Letters, 446.

⁴ ¹⁸⁰W.A. Day, A True History of Company I, 49th North Carolina Troops (Newton, NC: Enterprise Job

but could not get back without losing their lives. Many of those still alive were wounded and a far greater number were dead or would soon be. One of those laying on the battlefield in the hours after the charge was Lieut. F. O. Talbot of Company K. After the war, Talbot wrote an extensive description of what he experienced as he and a few of the other lucky survivors who could still move tried to make it back to the Union lines without being killed.

While Colonel Chaplin vocally protested the fate that had befallen his men, he appeared to have little to do with the efforts to bring relief to those men still left on the field. While individual officers and men of the First Maine and other regiments attempted to rescue their comrades, Colonel Chaplin exhibited a lack of concern for the welfare of those members of the First Maine Heavy Artillery that were still on the field. On the morning of June 20, Brigade General Robert McAllister wrote to his wife that he considered Colonel Chaplin a fair officer, but he thought that Colonel Chaplin might have made more of an effort to retrieve his wounded men. McAllister wrote that he called on Chaplin in the morning and awakened him from his slumber telling him that a few additional wounded men had been carried off the field by McAllister's own regiment. McAllister also informed Chaplin that the Confederates had allowed a flag of truce to remove the wounded and the dead that had been lying in the field for two nights and a day.¹⁸¹

In a matter of days the news of the disaster that had befallen the First Maine Heavy Artillery was called out in a headline of the Bangor Daily Whig that read "450

5 Office, 1893: Reprinted Baltimore, MD: Butternut and Blue, 1997)

6¹⁸¹ McAllister, Letters, 446.

dead or Wounded.” For the citizens of Bangor and many of the surrounding towns in eastern Maine the news was shocking. Hundreds of families who had only recently learned if their loved ones had survived the Battle of Harris Farm were now facing the possibility that their husbands or sons did not make it through this even bigger disaster. In less than thirty days the people of eastern Maine quickly realized that the horrors of a war almost 800 miles away could hit as quickly and as hard as if the war had been fought down the street.¹⁸²

Days after news of the charge had been made known, the Bangor Daily Whig printed the following: “The Fortunes of War: The First Maine Heavy Artillery started for the front about six weeks ago eighteen hundred strong. After the charge of the 18th they mustered only 342 muskets. Truly a frightful loss. Maine never has sent out a regiment which has gained such an enviable reputation or suffered so great a loss in so short a space of time.” Clearly the enormity of the tragedy was being realized on the home front.¹⁸³

When the overall scale of the tragedy was realized, rumors and allegations began to circulate in Bangor that placed the blame for the charge squarely on the shoulders of Colonel Chaplin. After the war, Major Frederick Low refers to a captain of the regiment, “copper head clear through,” who went to Bangor on a leave of absence and reported that the charge would not have been made but for Colonel Chaplin and that Chaplin was so drunk that he had to be carried off the field at the time of the charge. Frederick Low

⁷ ¹⁸² Bangor Daily Whig, June 23, 1864.

⁸ ¹⁸³ Bangor Daily Whig, June 29, 1864.

claimed after the war that he and the other officers of the regiment completely denied this allegation and others because they had no basis in truth.¹⁸⁴

This criticism of Chaplin was not the only criticism to be directed at the officers of the First Maine for the debacle that had decimated the regiment. Private John Steward in his first letter home to his wife after the charge expressed his dismay over the position and condition of the regiment and claimed “[w]hiskey is accountable for the larger share of this. It was the cause of taking five or six hundred out of our regiment. One glass of whiskey is worth more to our officers than a soldier’s life.”¹⁸⁵ A member of the First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery wrote that he had heard that the Charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery was referred to as the “Whiskey Charge.”¹⁸⁶

Was the use of alcohol by officers of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, most notably Colonel Daniel Chaplin, the reason for ordering the charge on June 18, 1864, that saw over 600 men of the regiment killed or wounded? Most likely not, but Chaplin and those in command above him were not blameless for the debacle that was the charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. General David Birney, commander of the Second Corps, and General Gershom Mott, commander of the Third division, and to some degree Colonel Daniel Chaplin, commander of the Third Brigade, should have realized that by the late afternoon of June 18, 1864, the Union army had lost the opportunity to capture the city of Petersburg, Virginia. They failed to see that by the afternoon of June 18 the Confederate defenses were fully manned by the veterans of Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia. While many of the veteran Union troops could clearly understand

¹⁸⁴ Frederick Low, Letter to Robert McAllister, January 17, 1871. Low Letters.

¹⁸⁵ John Steward, Letter to Abby Steward, June 27, 1864. John Steward Letters.

the hopelessness of the situation, the commanders of the Second Corps still believed they could capture the city of Petersburg with a series of frontal assaults. By ignoring the strength of the Confederate position that their command was facing, and by believing that a massed charge would finally carry the day, these Union commanders insured that the First Maine Heavy Artillery would earn the distinction of having suffered the highest amount of battle casualties of any Union regiment during a single action. But even if commanders, including Colonel Chaplin, did not see the hopelessness of the situation, surely the men of the regiment knew the daunting odds they faced. Yet even after what the men of the regiment had seen at Cold Harbor and during the opening days of the move on Petersburg they were not disillusioned enough to refuse to charge when ordered. The question is why?

One credible reason is the argument that Colonel Chaplin still held sway over his regiment due to his commanding presence and respect that his men had for him. The sense of discipline that he had built in his regiment still held strong. Discipline and the inexperience of the regiment were key factors that that caused the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery to faithfully attempt to execute the destructive charge at Petersburg on June 18, 1864. As one Civil War author writes, “strict discipline builds the actions of soldiers to a common purpose and to orderly conduct” and with this sense of discipline Colonel Chaplin was able to get his men to focus on the mission at hand, and carry out the orders they had been giving, overlooking the daunting odds they faced. It was his overriding sense of discipline, and military bearing that caused Colonel Chaplin

¹ ¹⁸⁶N.P. Cutter, “Before Petersburg,” Boston Journal (Boston, MA) January 24,

to order his regiment into the charge and his regiment's trust in his leadership that led to the bloody history that the First Maine Heavy Artillery earned on June 18, 1864.¹⁸⁷

The inexperience of the First Maine Heavy Artillery showed itself in the state of mind the men expressed especially with regard to their motivation and sense of duty to carry out their orders even in the face of terrible odds. To the men of the regiment standing and facing the enemy was an issue of honor. There was still a strong sense of duty within these men from Maine. On the day before the charge, Captain Frederick Howes wrote to his wife that there was still confidence in General Grant and a belief that the Army will be successful; he wrote "we hope to celebrate the 4th of July in Richmond. I believe we will" as the army has "worked very hard getting here and we have hard work before us still, ... we have the will and the courage to do it, trusting in our commander to arrange our work and our all wise God for his blessing on our efforts."¹⁸⁸

The First Maine Heavy Artillery was not the only inexperienced regiment in the lines at Petersburg that was ordered to charge on June 18. The First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery was also ordered to charge in support of the First Maine. When the time to charge came, however, the First Massachusetts did not move. The only key difference between the First Maine and the First Massachusetts was the First Maine was in the front line while the First Massachusetts was positioned behind veteran troops. When the veteran troops refused to move, the men of the First Massachusetts stayed put as well.

One veteran of the First Massachusetts recalled that "the First Maine Heavy Artillery had the first line and they were all cut to pieces. They were laid out in squads

² ¹⁸⁷ Craig S. Chapman, More Terrible Than Victory: North Carolina's Bloody Bethel Regiment, 1861-65.
3 (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1998) 3.

and companies. Some of our men who were on the skirmish line saw the whole of it. It beggars description. . . . If our regiment had had the first line we should probably have gone forward, but old campaigners were in front and knew better than to charge through a slaughter pen.”¹⁸⁹

In addition to their sense of discipline and fairly unspoiled faith in the cause, the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery also had another motivation to carry out the charge on June 18th. This motivation was the fear of being seen as cowardly by their fellow members of the regiment and more importantly within the eyes of the veteran regiments they had been serving with since they had joined the army in May. The First Maine had fought honorably at the battle of Harris Farm and they were recognized for having done so. Other Heavy Artillery Regiments that had not performed well, or worse, had broken and run while under fire did not earn themselves an honorable reputation. Captain Howes recalled that the Seventh New York Heavy Artillery had run while under fire and “gained for themselves a name in the army that everyone despises.” Being relatively new to the front lines the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery still believed that to avoid such a reputation they would have to remain strong under fire and carry out their orders without flinching. While veteran regiments still considered it dishonorable to break and run from the field in a disorderly fashion they had also come to develop a sense of caution that enabled them to retain their honor while at the same time practicing a degree of self-preservation. Actions such as orderly retreats while firing, seeking cover to hide behind and laying prone on the ground while firing were all things the veteran

⁴ ¹⁸⁸ Frederick Carr Howes to Mary Abigail Howes, June 4, 1864. Letters of Frederick Carr Howes.

soldiers were quick to use when the situation called for it. These actions had become accepted and learned behavior, which were brought about by almost three years of war. The men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery had not yet learned these skills and, therefore, when ordered to charge, the only action they considered was moving forward as ordered.¹⁹⁰

While a sense of disillusionment had gripped the ranks of the Second Corps prior to June 18th it was only after the charge that this same disillusionment seemed to grip the ranks of the First Maine Heavy Artillery when the men began to realize the enormity of the destruction that had befallen their regiment. Horace Shaw wrote after the battle: “it was an appalling sight to take a desperate chance for life and peer over the breastworks, across the field of slaughter strewn thick the blue coated bodies of those sterling sons of Maine, decomposing in the fierce rays of a Southern sun.” Shaw recalled that the “small remnant of men left from the gallant regiment were not only enfeebled in body but they were extremely sorrowful in heart,” as they realized that the dearest of friends and relatives were lying out on the battlefield. Private John Steward wrote a “soldiers life is not pleasant” and he urged his sons to stay out of the Army by stating if they knew “as much as I do that money would be no inducement.” It is important to note, however, that Private Steward in the same letter indicated that he had not lost faith in the cause he was fighting for.¹⁹¹

6¹⁸⁹ Roe, First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, 179 -

7¹⁹⁰ Frederick Carr Howes to Mary Abigail Howes, May, 26, 1864. Letters of Frederick Carr Howes.

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9¹⁹¹ Shaw, The First Maine Heavy Artillery, 123 - 125. John Steward, Letter to Abby Steward, June 27, 1864. John Steward Letters.

With the arrival of Robert E. Lee's army within the Confederate defenses on the morning of the June 18 the opportunity to capture Petersburg, which only three days before had seemed inevitable, was lost. The fact that the charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery was ordered clearly indicates that the top commanders of the Union army, U.S. Grant and George Gordon Meade, were for the most part out of touch with the situation at the front.

Ever since Grant had been put in command of the Union army, he had vigorously pushed to have his armies remain on the tactical offensive. Grant's reported philosophy on war was simple enough: "Find out where your enemy is and get at him as soon as you can. Strike at him as hard as you can and as often as you can, and keep him moving."¹⁹²

Throughout his career Grant had hardly ever fought on the defensive and his leadership during the opening battles of the 1864 campaign reflected his offensive preference no matter what the cost. In one of his official reports Grant explained why he believed his tactical offensive strategy was sound. Grant, according to one historian, wrote "the Battles of the Wilderness, Spottsylvania, North Anna, and Cold Harbor, bloody and terrible as they were on our side were even more damaging to the enemy and so crippled him as to make him wary ever after of taking the offensive."¹⁹³

While the overall impact of Civil War entrenchments and field works upon military strategy has been debated extensively by military historians, the evidence of how the prospects of assaulting an entrenched enemy affected the state of mind of many Civil War soldiers is much clearer. One military historian, upon his examination of Civil War

11¹⁹²Grady McWhiney and Perry Jamieson, Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern
12 Heritage (Birmingham: University of Alabama Press, 1982) 70. Herein cited as McWhiney,
13 Attack and Die.

battle tactics wrote that by 1864 the mere existence of a fortification, “however technically weak it might be, would usually be enough to forestall a serious attack. Digging a trench was thus in part a symbolic staking of a claim--the signal to the opponent that the ownership of this part of the battlefield was no longer negotiable. The armies learned to dig in automatically whenever they halted, as much to tell the their enemies not to try anything foolish as to give themselves physical protection from shot and shell.”¹⁹⁴

By the time the Union army was in front of Petersburg on June 18, 1864, it was clearly evident that after a month and a half of hard bitter fighting all across the Virginia countryside the Confederate Army was very quick to entrench. The multiple assaults against an entrenched enemy at the Wilderness, Spottsylvania, and most notably Cold Harbor, and even the preceding days at Petersburg had left many of the Union soldiers dead upon the battlefields of Virginia. These offensive attacks against entrenched positions contributed greatly to low morale and disillusionment amongst many of the veterans of the Union army. A Private in the Second Corps recalled that on June 18 as the veteran regiments prepared to assault a new line of Confederate intrenchments, “the soldiers were thoroughly discouraged, they had no heart for the assault. It was evident that they had determined not to fight stanchy, not to attempt to accomplish the impossible.” Clearly a sense of disillusionment has descended on the veterans of the Union Army Second Corps.¹⁹⁵

14¹⁹³ McWhiney, Attack and Die,

15¹⁹⁴ Paddy Griffith, Battle Tactics of the Civil War (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1989) 132.

16¹⁹⁵ Wilkeson, Turned Inside Out,

The men in the ranks knew the Union Army had lost its chance to capture Petersburg even if the Generals did not recognize the situation. As Private Wilkeson recalled in the late afternoon of June 18, “the infantry was sent to the slaughter, and the Confederates promptly killed a sufficient number of them to satisfy our generals that the works could not be taken by assaults. The Second Corps could have taken the city on the night of June 15th without losing more than 500 men. This fact disheartened the enlisted men. They were supremely disgusted with the display of military stupidity our generals had made.” It was this “stupidity” in combination with the freshness of the First Maine Heavy Artillery that led to the disastrous charge on June 18th.¹⁹⁶

The core of veterans within the Union Army Second Corps had suffered tremendously since Grant had started his overland campaign. Most of the Corps, with the exception of the Third Division, had suffered the brunt of the assaults at Cold Harbor. The Second Corps lost upwards of 3510 men during these assaults. Now in front of Petersburg the Second Corps was being asked to attack an entrenched enemy again. For most of the day on the June 18 portions of the Third Division of the Second Corps had already attempted numerous assaults upon the Confederate line. The assault immediately preceding the charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery that had been led by Robert McAllister’s Brigade had been soundly defeated with heavy casualties.

To Gershom Mott the ordering of the charge was necessary simply because he had been ordered to do it. Colonel Chaplin’s willingness to have his own regiment lead the assault can also be seen in the same light. Yet a simple defense of following orders may not be enough to free Chaplin or Mott from any blame in ordering the charge. General

¹⁹⁶Wilkeson, Turned Inside Out, 173 -

Mott and his subordinates, Colonel Chaplin and General McAllister, had already seen previous assaults fail and they could see the Confederates at work improving their defenses by adding more troops and by further strengthening their positions. While Mott, Chaplin, and McAllister should have clearly seen the hopelessness of further assaults against the Confederate position opposite the area of Hare House Hill, only McAllister attempted to protest against any further action. Even the veteran soldiers in the ranks could see the hopelessness of the situation, and, as a result, refused to take part. Frank Wilkeson wrote that shortly after arriving at Petersburg he came across some veteran troops of the Second Corps and asked, "Going in to the charge, men?" According to Wilkeson, "Nine or ten of the tired infantry soldiers heard the question, and they growled out an explanatory answer in tones that expressed the most profound disgust: 'No, we are not going to charge. We are going to run towards the Confederate earthworks, and then we are going to run back. We have had enough of assaulting earthworks.'"¹⁹⁷ Based on this and other similar feelings within the veteran regiments by June 18 it was clear to the commanders of the Second Corps that if any assault was going to succeed inexperience would have to be relied upon to lead the way.

The inexperience of the First Maine Heavy Artillery was clearly used by Mott as a reason for selecting them to lead the charge. In addition, Mott also saw in Colonel Daniel Chaplin a brave leader who carried the respect of his men. The combination of a brave commander and a regiment that was as loyal to their Colonel as they were inexperienced made the First Maine Heavy Artillery the ideal regiment to lead the charge at Hare House Hill on June 18, 1864. The lack of experience, combined with the

¹⁹⁷Wilkeson, Turned Inside Out, 180 -

regiment's willingness to follow the orders of their Colonel both out of a sense of duty and respect cost the First Maine Heavy Artillery dearly. It would also be this sense of duty and respect that deflected a lot of the blame for the charge away from Colonel Chaplin. These soldiers had come to truly trust and respect their Colonel after two years of service under his leadership. The feeling of many of the men in the ranks towards their Colonel was that he was the father of the regiment and that he would never intentionally lead his command into a slaughter, no more than a father would intentionally put his children in danger.

Looking back upon the charge, one veteran of the First Maine Heavy Artillery said that those units that refused to charge on June 18 did not hurt the Union cause. He noted that their refusal to charge saved the lives of a number of good men. It is clear that had the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery been as equally careful with their lives, the regiment would not have suffered so much. This veteran also recalled that the training the regiment had received made it impossible for the men to hold back when ordered to move forward. So forward the regiment went "to tread this winepress of human wrath alone."¹⁹⁸

The service of the First Maine Heavy Artillery did not end on June 18, 1864. The regiment continued to serve within the ranks of the Union Army Second Corps throughout the siege of Petersburg and during the pursuit of Lee's Army to Appomattox. The regiment would suffer more casualties and be witness to more carnage, but they remained faithful to the cause of the Union.

¹⁹⁸Talbot, "A Balaklava of Our Civil War."

The table below summarizes the casualties suffered by the First Maine Heavy Artillery during the battles they participated in after the charge on June 18, 1864.¹⁹⁹ This table illustrates clearly is that the first thirty days of active campaigning where the heaviest fighting the regiment would experience. Because of this the first thirty days especially the charge on June 18, became the focal point of the memories for most of the surviving veterans. When these veterans sat down to record the regiment's history they tended to focus on what happened in May and June of 1864 not only because of the degree of casualties that this period of time brought but also because this period of time earned for the First Maine Heavy Artillery a level of distinction that could not be easily matched by any other Union regiment.

Table 2: Regimental Casualties June 22, 1864, to April 7, 1865

Battle	Killed or Died of Wounds	Wounded	Prisoners	Total
Jerusalem Plank Road, June 22, 1864	4	15	21	40
Battle of the Crater, July 30, 1864		1		1
Deep Bottom, Aug 16 - 19, 1864	2	8		10
Fort Hell, Sept 9, 1864			6	6
Squirrel Level Road, Oct 2, 1864	4	3	1	8
Boydton Plank Road, Oct 27, 1864	10	25	12	47
Weldon Raid, Dec 6 - 12, 1864			2	2
Siege of Petersburg, June 23 to March 29, 1865	8	26		34
Advance on Petersburg, March 25, 1865	5	15	7	27
Hatcher's Run, March 31, 1865	1	3		4
Sailors Creek, April 6, 1865	3	35		38
Farmville, April 7, 1865		2		2
Total	17	79	49	219

¹⁹⁹Shaw, The First Maine Heavy Artillery,

One incident that had a remarkable impact on the recorded history of the First Maine after the charge on June 18 was the death of Colonel Chaplin on August 20, 1864. For all Chaplin's faults, real or imagined, while he was in command the regiment had a solid foundation of leadership that was fairly stable, and he kept his regiment focused on their duty even during the most trying of times. His death, coupled with the esteem he was held in by his men, positioned Daniel Chaplin as more of a martyr than villain when the surviving veterans started to recall and record the history of the regiment.

Chaplin's faithful belief in military order and discipline had cost his regiment dearly on June 18. Realizing that the system had broken down, leaving his regiment to face certain slaughter alone, deeply affected Colonel Chaplin. The results of the charge also greatly affected the survivors of the regiment far beyond the physical and mental effects of seeing their comrades wounded and killed in pursuit of a hopeless charge. The enormity of the charge, while it became a badge of honor for the survivors, also served as a point of division. With Chaplin's death, a split quickly developed over who would assume command of the regiment.

Following Chaplin's death, the remaining officers and men were left to pick up the pieces of a shattered regiment. With Chaplin gone the senior officers of the regiment, namely Lt. Colonel Thomas Talbot and Major Russell B. Shepherd, began to jockey for position in order to be promoted as commander of the regiment. While Talbot was the ranking officer after Chaplin, his level of respect among the men was seriously undermined because he had not participated in the charge. In addition, on June 22, 1864, with Talbot in command, the regiment broke and ran after the Confederates had outflanked the Union Line along the Jerusalem Plank Road. The fact that the First Maine

Heavy Artillery had run away in face of the enemy was not unique as virtually the entire Union Army Second Corps ran that day; however, the regiment did leave a stand of colors in the hands of the enemy. While the men obeyed their Lt. Colonel no one viewed him as a man of great military bearing or respected him the way they did Colonel Chaplin. It was this perception that caused Major Shepherd to write to Adjutant General Hodson only seven days after Colonel Chaplin had died to state that, although well educated, Lt. Colonel Talbot was not an effective soldier and should not be put in charge of the regiment.²⁰⁰

The disagreement over who should become the new Colonel of the First Maine Heavy Artillery eventually grew into a heated dispute that had all the officers of the regiment aligning themselves with either Lt. Colonel Talbot or with Major Shepherd. Eventually in September while on leave again for illness, Lt. Col. Talbot was offered the colonancey of the First Maine Heavy Artillery over the arguments of Shepherd and his allies. Although tempted by the offer, Talbot thought that it was better for his health if he resigned his commission and left the army. Talbot did resign and the command of the First Maine Heavy Artillery was given to Major Russell B. Shepherd.²⁰¹

By most accounts the appointment of Shepherd was considered a good decision, except by those who had supported Talbot. A few complaints were made that Shepherd took some revenge on those who supported his rival, but for the most part Shepherd's

²¹²⁰⁰ Russell B. Shepherd, Letter to Governor Samuel Cony, August 27, 1864. ms. Correspondence of the
22 First Maine Heavy Artillery.

²³²⁰¹ Thomas Talbot, Letter to Governor Samuel Cony, October 14, 1864. ms. Correspondence of the
24 First

Maine Heavy Artillery.

energy was spent rebuilding the First Maine Heavy Artillery into an effective and well-trained regiment.²⁰²

This episode between Talbot and Shepherd highlighted another way in which the charge on June 18 was considered in the memory of the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. Participation in the charge was a badge of honor and the mark of a true veteran. Those who missed out on what was to that point, and would remain the most significant experience of the regiment could not adequately share in the brotherhood of the “gallant 900.” Explaining this treatment of Lt. Colonel Talbot and his eventual separation from the regiment is easier to understand when it becomes clear that the charge of June 18 was the high watermark for the First Maine Heavy Artillery.²⁰³

The majority of the veterans of the First Maine Heavy Artillery who chose to record the regiment’s history decided not to focus on the controversial aspects of the charge and instead became comfortable with looking upon the charge as the culmination of their patriotic duty. The fact that the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery came to look upon the charge as more of an heroic endeavor than as a military mistake is understandable. By seeing that charge as honorable they were better able to view their sacrifices and overall term of service in the same honorable light.

²⁵²⁰²Letter to Governor Samuel Cony, September 14, 1864. ms. Correspondence of the First Maine Heavy

26 Artillery.

²⁷²⁰³Rev. E.F. Davis of Auburn, Maine wrote and published a poem entitled “The Charge of the 900,” which

28 became a favorite among the survivors of the First Maine Heavy

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Chapter 10

Recalling the History

When the American Civil War ended in 1865, almost 200,000 Union and Confederate soldiers had been killed or mortally wounded in combat.²⁰⁴ Hundreds of thousands of others were wounded in combat and carried their physical and emotional scars for the rest of their lives. These wounded soldiers and other surviving veterans would struggle for many years to interpret their experiences during the war. In the years immediately following the war most veterans, like the rest of the nation, tried their best to put the war behind them. The First Maine Heavy Artillery also did their best to put the war behind them and resume their lives where they had left them. For the most part they seemed content to leave their memories of the war alone.²⁰⁵

During the mid to late 1870s a marked turn in the process of remembering the war began to take place. Eventually as memories of the war “softened, and distance lent perspective to the veteran,” the veterans found “it possible to deal with the war as a conscious memory and to ponder it as a significant experience” in their lives.²⁰⁶ Veteran organizations, such as the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) and the Military Order of the Loyal Legion, as well as regimental-based veteran groups, began to be organized. The immediate objective of most of these organizations was to recapture the fraternal feeling that many of these veterans had experienced during their time of service. The fraternal nature of these organizations was forged from the common experiences of life, death,

²⁹²⁰⁴Civil War Book of Lists. 89 - 104.

³⁰²⁰⁵Hess, Union Solider in Battle, 160.

boredom, fatigue, and relief that these veterans had shared with their comrades who were united in a common cause. For Union organizations like the GAR, the experience of its members was not just connected to the Civil War, it was also greatly connected to the history of the Republic. The GAR and other veteran groups saw the preservation of the history of the Civil War as an important endeavor that would link the “patriotic achievements of the past with the patriotic hopes of the future.”²⁰⁷ In this role these veteran organizations served as the primary building blocks for the recording of the written history of the Civil War as they helped generate interest amongst the veterans in capturing their war experience in writing, saving it for future generations.

One of most prolific and popular forms of written Civil War history to emerge in the decades following the war was the regimental history. Between the years 1880 and 1910, hundreds of regimental histories were written in an attempt to put into words the experience of regiments and the men who served in these units and to place these regiments into their perceived proper historical context.

As with most postwar accounts written by veterans, there is a question as to how much the scribing of events has been affected by the passage of time and the desire to put events into a more heroic light. In the 1880s and 1890s the nation’s memory of the Civil War became more integrated into a public ritual in which, according to Gerald Linderman, the reputation of soldiering rose and simple participation in the war became an important mark of merit and badge of distinction: “Honor attached itself less to

31²⁰⁶Hess, The Union Solider in Battle,

32²⁰⁷Stuart McConnell, Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic 1865 - 1900 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992)

courageous or cowardly conduct, battles won or lost, causes preserved or destroyed then to one's simple presence and participation in the war."²⁰⁸

This increased interest in the memories of the war sparked a transformation during the later part of the nineteenth century that saw communities, veteran organizations, and the veterans themselves searching for a fitting way to memorialize their sacrifice for the cause they had fought for. It is in this increased public ritual that the veterans of the First Maine Heavy Artillery found themselves when they set out to write the history of the regiment in the 1870s. For the historians of the First Maine Heavy Artillery this environment made it important for the authors to not only show that they and their comrades had served, but more importantly that they had survived a "pathetic tale of sacrifice, suffering and death."²⁰⁹

As time went by, hard memories towards the war were soon overshadowed as many veterans expressed faith in the cause and chose to avoid the negative aspects of war. For the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery the avoidance of the negative aspects of the war was difficult because it was the charge and the disastrous history of the regiment that bonded the survivors together. Yet, even with this history, the veterans of the First Maine Heavy Artillery remained proud of their sacrifices and the sacrifices of their comrades, many of whom had paid the ultimate price in helping to preserve the Union. Lieutenant Frederick O. Talbot wrote after the war that no matter how much other veterans derided the Heavy Artillery Regiments for spending too much time in the forts

33²⁰⁸Linderman, Embattled Courage, 277.

34²⁰⁹Shaw, The First Maine Heavy Artillery, X.

and for not meeting with splendid success upon the battlefield, he was proud to have served three years with the First Maine Heavy Artillery.²¹⁰

As time went on the surviving veterans of the First Maine Heavy Artillery did attempt to make sense of the events that had transpired and made the experience of the regiment so costly and tragic. To the survivors of the regiment the charge of June 18, 1864, came to signify the single most defining moment of the regiment's term of service and to them it became important to get the details of what transpired.

In 1871 Frederick Low, a former Major in the First Maine Heavy Artillery and an active contributor to the history of the regiment corresponded with various former brigade and divisional officers of the Union Army Second Corps. His goal was to determine who ordered the charge of the First Maine on June 18, 1864. In many of these letters, Low disputes those who place responsibility for the charge upon Colonel Chaplin. Through this work, Low corresponded with former Union Brigadier General Robert McAllister of New Jersey who expressed the view that the orders for the charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery on June 18, 1864, had come directly from army headquarters. This version of events became the popular and accepted by the survivors of the First Maine Heavy Artillery because it complemented their view of the charge as being an honorable experience. Low wrote that Robert McAllister's version of events leading up to the charge, was the first version "which relieved Colonel Chaplin of the responsibility for the charge made by some blockhead members of the regiment and others," and showed that the order to charge had been supported at the highest levels.²¹¹

35²¹⁰Frederick O. Talbot, "The Heavy Artillery," National Tribune 23 January 1890: 3.

36²¹¹Frederick Low, Letter to Robert McAllister, January 17, 1871. Low Letters.

Professor Edward J. Hagerty, in his history of the One Hundred Fourteenth Pennsylvania, writes that virtually all regimental histories published between 1880 and 1910 were almost universally composed of “nostalgia and propaganda.” According to Hagerty the resulting concoction usually “tended to overlook any serious shortcomings of the men or of the regiment as a whole.” William Marvel, in his history of the Ninth New Hampshire, writes that “the regimental histories, in particular, must be scanned with a skeptical eye, written as they were by men whose memories had twenty or thirty years in which to be corrupted by popular beliefs -- men with too great a tendency toward mutual flattery.”²¹²

The process of recording the memory of the Civil War veterans was not always straightforward nor consistent for all veterans. Historians have tended to place Union Civil War memories into three main groups depending how these authors choose to record the history of their service. The majority of Civil War veteran authors tended to develop an ideology that reasserted a commitment to the cause of Union. To them the dark side of war was greatly overshadowed by the righteousness of the endeavor in which they fought for. In contrast another group lost faith in the cause and became a “lost generation” of sorts. They tended to not see any redeeming qualities in the sacrifices they endured. The last group had relatively positive views of the war, but instead of justifying their experience from an ideologically perspective or looking at the dark side of war, they tended to look favorably upon the comradeship and other satisfying aspects of their service.

³⁷²¹²Edward J. Hagerty, Collis' Zouaves: The 114th Pennsylvania Volunteers in the Civil War (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997) xii. William Marvel, Race of the Soil:

What is missing in all previous accounts of the history of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, and more specifically the charge of June 18, is any type of satisfactory explanation for how and why the regiment was ordered to undertake such a disastrous endeavor. By June of 1864 it should have been evident that the massed charge, close-formation military tactics of 1861 that the First Maine Heavy Artillery had been trained in were no longer effective. As Gerald Linderman writes in his study of courage in Civil War combat, “Civil War battles revealed by degree that bravery was no guarantor of victory, that rifled muskets and defensive works could thwart the most spirited charge” and that soldiers could sense the insufficiency of courage as the war progressed as they were faced with the consequences of modern war. Linderman further writes that by the spring of 1864 the soldiers who went to war in 1861 and 1862 had begun to no longer see combat as an experience that would “purify and strengthen individual character.” So while many of these men were still committed to the cause they were fighting for, they had replaced a blind allegiance to the cause for Union with more of a balanced view that had the Union soldier of the Army of the Potomac fighting for the Union, and in some cases against slavery, while at the same time being concerned with their own self-preservation.²¹³

This transformation is what Linderman refers to as the disillusionment or eroding of the ante-bellum perceptions of bravery and courage that had motivated so many to join the army in 1861 and 1862. While the evidence, mostly letters written during the war in 1864 and 1865, indicate that many soldiers were questioning some of the motivations that

The Ninth New Hampshire Regiment in the Civil War (Wilmington, NC.: Broadfoot Publishing, 1988)
38²¹³ Linderman, Embattled Courage, 156,

caused them to enlist in the first place, almost all post-war accounts fail to mention any eroding of the soldier's conviction to the cause.

By the time survivors of the First Maine Heavy Artillery sat down to record their history, the passage of time had eroded almost all negative reflections they had about their term of service. There is no questioning of the ideals that had motivated them to fight in the first place. However, the loss of so many men on June 18 could not be overlooked by the survivors. Due to the significance of the carnage, the charge of June 18 became the focal point of the regiment's sacrifice for the cause of Union. The charge was considered as much heroic as it was significant. The survivors knew that the charge had to be memorialized in song, poem, and stone. Their comrades who died were seen as martyrs for the cause. Instead of focusing on how the charge may have psychologically impacted the regiment or disillusioned them from a blind commitment to the ideals of honor and courage, the history of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, as recorded by the survivors, was written when the passage of time had allowed the bad memories of war to be suppressed and the virtues of war, which reflected the ideals manliness, honor, duty, and courage, to again be held in esteem within American society.

In looking at the original history of the First Maine Heavy Artillery written by Horace Shaw in 1903, the ideological commitment to the cause for Union is clearly indicated. In the closing line of the regimental history, Shaw reminds the reader of the "awful price paid by this regiment in blood, suffering and death" so that the United States could develop into the glorious country that it was. This ideological view of the history of the regiment tends to overlook the factual details of the regiment's history. Factors that described how the charge on June 18 was ordered and who was responsible for ordering

it were omitted. Instead, the history focused on the heroic sacrifice of the men and on the father-like leadership and influence of Daniel Chaplin. Horace Shaw explains that the First Maine Heavy Artillery went into the charge knowing that it would be an impossible task, but that the regiment went forward because “the first duty of a soldier is obedience to orders.” When the order to charge came “they obeyed it with alacrity.”²¹⁴

Upon a closer examination of the original regimental history of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, written by Horace Shaw and Charles J. House over a thirty-year period, it is clear to see that this history is peppered with the “nostalgia and propaganda” that Edward Hagerty refers to. Horace Shaw wrote in his introduction to the original regimental history that it was his intention “to produce a history which would set the regiment and its members in their proper place in the history of our country.”²¹⁵

When one compares the unprecedented tragic history of the First Maine Heavy Artillery to its written history, one gets the distinct impression that the authors viewed their history through a nostalgic lens. This lens was used by the authors to focus on what they viewed to be the regiment’s place within the context of the nation’s history. Shaw wrote that he had “endeavored to outline briefly the glorious results to our country and its people of the unity, freedom, and power we now enjoy.”²¹⁶

To further this goal the authors focused on the heroic aspects of the regiment’s history, rather than accurately recording a more rounded history of the men who lived, served, and in many cases died within the ranks of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. They did not want to focus on any details of the history of the regiment that would take away

39²¹⁴ Shaw, The First Maine Heavy Artillery, 122.

40²¹⁵ Shaw, The First Maine Heavy Artillery, VII.

from the heroic perception of what they and their comrades had experienced. Descriptions of events, such as the fear of going into battle, anger towards those who had ordered the charge, and subsequent destruction of the regiment, and the infighting amongst the officers and men were ignored. Horace Shaw instead focused on how the sacrifices, and contributions of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, and other Union veterans were part of the national experience that by the close of the nineteenth century had help build the United States into a glorious county, a country that produced 35 percent of the world's goods, raised 40 percent of the world's agricultural products, and had mineral wealth that surpassed that of any other country.²¹⁷

Shaw's desire to connect his regiment's contributions to the national path of progress underway in the United States during the late nineteenth century was not unusual. During this period "various political or social factions in the United States, including the veterans themselves, repeatedly used the image of a suffering, heroic, or sanctified veteran to advance a particular agenda."²¹⁸ Shaw himself was actively involved in politics serving in the Maine State Legislature and owned one of the largest shoe factories in the State of Maine. Focusing on the heroic nature of the sacrifice of First Maine Heavy Artillery allowed Shaw to more easily suppress any negative feelings he may have had about the war, and to capitalize in business and politics because of the renewed attention being paid to the heroic Union veteran.²¹⁹

41²¹⁶Shaw, The First Maine Heavy Artillery,

42²¹⁷Shaw, The First Maine Heavy Artillery, 206.

43²¹⁸Eric T. Dean, Jr., Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress Vietnam, and the Civil War (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) 215. Herein cited as Dean, Shook Over Hell.

45²¹⁹Men of Progress: Biographical Sketches and Portraits of Leaders in Business and Professional Life in and of the State of Maine (Boston: New England Magazine, 1897) 579 - 580.

The passage of time, the dimming of memory, and the selective recording of events regarding the history of the First Maine Heavy Artillery do not completely destroy the historic value of the current written history. Only through the efforts of Charles House and Horace Shaw have many of the details, accounts, and descriptions of what happened to the First Maine Heavy Artillery regiment and to the individuals who served with the regiment, been preserved. To the survivors of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, questioning or placing blame for the charge on an individual was not as crucial as focusing on the struggles, and sacrifices faced by the men of the regiment in their attempt to preserve the cause for Union. Overall, the history of the First Maine Heavy Artillery is unique due to the high casualty rate and the relatively short period of time the regiment actually served in combat, yet the history that the survivors focused on recording was an ideological view of their experience that bonded them to the societal ideals of duty, honor, and courage.

The process by which the survivors of the First Maine Heavy Artillery chose to record their history is not unique even though their battle experience is remarkable. Instead, the process of recording the history of the First Maine Heavy Artillery shows that even with unprecedented tragedy on the battlefield, the memories of most Civil War soldiers were fairly consistent. In other words, the recorded memory of the veterans of the First Maine Heavy Artillery is no better and no worse than the hundred of other recollections written by veterans during the last part of the nineteenth century. They are recollections of experiences brought about by youthful desires and motivations that were founded in the ideals of honor, duty, and bravery. Although through the course of the war these ideals were tested and sometimes muted and somewhat replaced by more practical

motivations like self-preservation, the passage of time found many veterans coming back to embrace the same ideals they went to war with in 1861 and 1862. Through the process of recording their history, these veterans re-embraced these ideals and were able to overlook any disillusionment that they might have experienced while living through the war. By focusing on their earlier ideals these veterans found it easier to remain proud of their service to the country.

The men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery had every right to be proud of their service to the Union, yet this pride was always overshadowed by what had happened to the regiment on June 18, 1864. As best they could many of the veterans tried to find as many details as possible to determine how the charge transpired. They were not able to come to a conclusive determination, and opted to let the dead lie where they were. Instead, the veteran historians of the First Maine Heavy Artillery decided to leave the controversy surrounding the charge unresolved and memorialize the sacrifice of the regiment instead. By doing this, they could more easily view the charge as simply a heroic endeavor that came about as a result of following orders. The survivors of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, like many Civil War veterans, although they had suffered many hardships and dangers often found their experience in the military to have been the most meaningful time of their lives. Clouding this positive reflection with repeated arguments over who was responsible for the charge on June 18 was an issue they preferred to eventually leave alone when they set down to record their history.²²⁰

Can the question of who was responsible for ordering the devastating charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery on June 18, 1864, ever be answered? Not with any

degree of certainty. Clearly orders to charge were received from General Meade and passed on down through Generals Birney and Mott on to Colonel Chaplin. Should the orders have been given, and should they have been followed? In hindsight it is easy to answer “no”, but Colonel Chaplin did not have the benefit of hindsight and could only rely on his sense of military order and discipline. It was this sense of military order and discipline that caused him to fail to recognize the mortal danger he was putting his men in. It was this same sense of military discipline and order that Chaplin has instilled in his command and as a result the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery went headlong into a devastating charge that was nothing more than a desperate hope. Regis de Trobriand described the ordering of the charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery as a “deplorable mistake,” but to Colonel Chaplin and the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery it was an issue of honor.²²¹

1 ²²⁰Dean, Shook Over Hell, photo caption.

2 ²²¹Regis De Trobriand, Four Years with the Army of the Potomac. (Boston: Ticknor, 1889) 631.

3 Herein cited as De Trobiand. Four .

Chapter 11

Conclusion

It is my conclusion that Colonel Daniel Chaplin, although well respected by his men for his leadership, is responsible for the slaughter that befell the regiment on June 18, 1864. This responsibility resulted from Chaplin's unwillingness or inability to recognize that the course of war had changed since he had last experienced battle in 1862. Instead of seeing the hopelessness of attacking a strongly held Confederate position with a massed frontal assault, Chaplin chose to rely on precepts of bravery, courage, and discipline, believing that his well-trained, inexperienced troops could successfully carry out the assault. The First Maine Heavy Artillery, under the leadership of their well-respected colonel remained grounded in the military and societal precepts of honor, bravery, and sense of duty that so influenced the course of the war in 1861 and 1862. When they emerged from the forts surrounding Washington in the spring of 1864, they were unexposed and unfamiliar with the disillusionment that had cast a shadow upon the veterans of the Union Army. To the veterans of Antietam, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and the Wilderness, honor, duty, and bravery meant something different in the spring of 1864. Gone was the conviction that if a soldier was well disciplined, brave, and courageous under fire then he had good prospects to survive and be victorious. Instead of finding honor in dying a soldier's death, a feeling that had so marked the spirit of the Union Army in 1861, veteran soldiers in 1864 were more satisfied with trying to find a way to survive. As the veterans saw how the war had depleted their once plentiful ranks, they began to realize that the longer the war went on the more likely they were to become

the next casualty. This sense of vulnerability made the veterans less willing to put their lives on the line. This new realization, coupled with the increased effectiveness of the weaponry and improved defensive tactics, worked to affect the nature of war in 1864. It was this new face of war that the First Maine Heavy Artillery was ill prepared to deal with when they came to the front.

The charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery comes down to Chaplin's judgment. His men were brave and willing to follow the orders of a man they respected and trusted, but the question remains why did not Chaplin see the hopelessness of the charge? His counterpart, General Robert McAllister, recognized the danger and protested the charge. Although ordered to support the charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, the entire command of the First Massachusetts Heavy Artillery and the Sixteenth Massachusetts laid down instead of advancing. According to an official report when Major Cooper of the Seventh New Jersey ordered his regiment forward he quickly realized that he was not being properly supported and therefore did not move his regiment beyond the Hare house. Apparently the officers of these regiments also saw the hopelessness of the charge.²²²

If Chaplin did see the hopelessness of the charge the fact remains he still ordered his regiment to lead the assault because he believed it was his responsibility to fulfill the orders he had been given. While there is no direct evidence to show that Colonel Chaplin had any idea that his order would come at a high cost to his regiment he must have known that previous assaults earlier in the day had already been repulsed with moderate losses.

²²²OR. Series I, Volume XL (1), S#80,

Colonel Daniel Chaplin was a man who was disciplined and brave. He expected no less from his command. To him, the order to have the First Maine Heavy Artillery charge on the afternoon of June 18, 1864, was an order he would follow without question. His regiment had proven themselves brave and capable at the battle of Harris Farm only a month before, and Chaplin no doubt felt confident that they would be so again at Petersburg. Chaplin himself had exhibited personal bravery and his quest for victory was an overriding force that dictated much of his actions. His behavior at First Bull Run, charging and recapturing an overrun Union battery, and his strict adherence to military discipline and order, indicates that even if Chaplin had recognized the hopelessness of the charge, he would not go against the concept of military discipline and disregard or dispute his orders. He expected no less from his men and because of the respect the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery had for their Colonel they went headlong in a tempest of shot, shell, and fire.

Chaplin's response after the charge and his display of emotion were not only a reaction to his own feelings but also a reaction to the total lack of discipline exhibited from the other commands of the 3rd Division that led directly to the devastation and destruction that slaughtered his regiment. To Chaplin it must have felt that his whole world had been turned upside down, as the value system he had come to respect and instill in his command hurt him and his regiment in two ways.

First, a strict adherence to orders put the First Maine Heavy Artillery into a hopeless situation and, second, the breakdown of this system led directly to the First Maine Heavy Artillery bearing the entire brunt of the Confederate response to the assault along this section of the line. The cost for this breakdown of the system was tremendous

and devastating upon the ranks of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, and it also had an impact on Colonel Chaplin, beyond his excited outburst directed at his fellow regimental and brigade commanders. According to General Regis De Trobriand, after seeing the butchery that he had brought upon his own regiment, Colonel Chaplin was struck a “mortal blow, from which he did not recover,” because he felt such a responsibility for the devastation that had come upon his regiment he lost his will to live.²²³

The embodiment of the devastation that Chaplin must have felt left a long-lasting impression upon Regis De Trobriand. De Trobriand wrote many years after the war that when Daniel Chaplin saw the First Maine Heavy Artillery “sacrificed under his eyes by a fantasy as deadly as useless, a melancholy discouragement took hold of him. Somber presentiments besieged him. He was surrounded by phantoms.” Colonel Chaplin was a troubled man.²²⁴

After the charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery Colonel Chaplin, according to some reports, purposely exposed himself to enemy fire. On August 17, 1864, less than two months after the charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery this behavior cost Colonel Chaplin his life. While inspecting a skirmish line Colonel Chaplin was shot and mortally wounded by a Confederate sharpshooter at Deep Bottom, Virginia. Chaplin was removed from the field and sent to Turner’s Lane Hospital in Philadelphia. Those who saw him knew his wound was mortal. On August 20, 1864, Colonel Daniel Chaplin died. Before he passed away, Chaplin sent a message to his men: “Tell the boys to obey orders and

5²²³De Trobriand, Four Years, 632.

6²²⁴De Trobriand, Four Years, 632.

never flinch.” It was his final attempt to instill a sense of duty and discipline in his men.²²⁵

General de Trobriand commented after the war that he saw the charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery as a “deplorable mistake.” According to de Trobriand, the charge more than likely came as a result of an overeager Corps commander, in this case General Birney, a Division Commander, and General Gershom Mott, who may not have had the moral courage to dispute the order.²²⁶

The brigade commander, according to de Trobriand, should have a clear understanding if an ordered action will bring about the useless destruction of one or more of the regiments under his command and should question such an order. At the same time, General de Trobriand admitted that in all likelihood the questioning of an order will not change the order, and the order must be obeyed, despite the risks. Did Colonel Chaplin question the order or realize the situation that the First Maine Heavy Artillery was being ordered into? The available records do not show any indication that he did. Additionally, it was not in Chaplin’s nature to question orders. In summation as a result of Birney’s overeagerness, Mott’s lack of moral courage or lack of grasp of the situation and Chaplin’s willingness to follow orders and prove the worthiness of his command the First Maine Heavy Artillery suffered heavily on June 18, 1864.²²⁷

What happened to the First Maine Heavy Artillery was a direct result of the fact that the military tactics they had been trained in and ordered to use in the field were tactics of another age. This problem was especially acute given the fact that while the

⁷ ²²⁵James A. Dole, War Record First Maine Heavy Artillery. np, nd. Herein cited as Dole, War Record.
⁸ ²²⁶De Trobriand, Four Years, 631.

First Maine Heavy Artillery was completely drilled and trained by Colonel Chaplin in the tactics of 1861, the weaponry had greatly advanced, changing the nature of the Civil War battlefield.

When the First Maine Heavy Artillery arrived on the battlefield they were still relying on the tactics of 1862, they were unfamiliar with entrenchments, and they had come to rely on the leadership of their commander without questioning his authority or the orders he gave them. In other words, in the late spring of 1864, when the previous three years of war had greatly changed the course and nature of how the war was fought, the First Maine Heavy Artillery was grounded in the precepts and values that they had gone off to war with in 1862. With almost two years in the forts guarding Washington there was virtually no outside influence to change this foundation. The grounding in these values and experience that were unchanged from the summer of 1862 were probably the biggest contributing factors to why the First Maine Heavy Artillery holds the distinction of suffering the highest number of battle casualties out of any Union Regiment during the American Civil War.

Civil War historian Bruce Catton explained this point best by writing that the point of infantry tactics in 1861 was that they depended on the extreme limitation of the infantry's effective field of fire.

A column of assault, preparing to attack an enemy position, could be massed and brought forward with complete confidence that until it got comparatively close range nothing very damaging could happen to it. From that moment on, everything was up to the determination and numbers of the attackers. Once they had begun to charge, the opposing line could not possibly get off more than one or two shots per man. If the assaulting

⁹²²⁷ De Trobiand, Four Years.

column had proper numerical advantage, plus enough discipline and leadership to keep it moving forward despite losses, it was very likely to succeed.

The assaulting column always went in with fixed bayonets, because any charge that was really driven home would wind up with hand to hand fighting. And if the assailants could get to close quarters with a fair advantage in numbers, either the actual use of bayonet or the terrible threat of it would finish the business.

Artillery, properly massed, might change the picture. The smoothbore field pieces of the old days were indeed of limited range, but they very greatly out-ranged the infantry musket, and if a general had enough guns banked up at a proper spot in his defensive line he could count on breaking up a charging column, or at least on cutting it open and destroying its cohesion, before it got within infantry range....Up to 1861, all the intricate bits of infantry drill which the recruits had learn, and all of the professional thinking of the generals who directed their movements, were based on weapons of limited range and tactics of rather personal assault. Then, suddenly, the whole business went out of date, because the weapons became more effective especially at longer range. All of this meant that the old manner of making an attack was no longer good.²²⁸

Based on Catton's observations, to have massed an assaulting column like the First Maine and have it charge toward an entrenched enemy with the men moving elbow to elbow was simply to invite destruction. The destruction that came upon the First Maine Heavy Artillery was caused by the fact that the commanders of the Second Corps and most notably Colonel Chaplin were trained in and relied on tactics that were worse than useless.

As Catton further describes, it took the process of actual combat to educate most field commanders that the tactics they had trained in were outdated by the modernization of the weapons and evolution of new defensive tactics. Commanders of regiments that had fought through the early battles of the war were able to gradually adjust the execution of their offensive tactics. The men in the ranks also benefited from the gradual realization

that the improved weaponry of the Civil War called for changes in the tactics they used. By 1864 almost every veteran soldier understood clearly the benefit of cover and that is why these veterans were eager to dig rifle pits and entrenchments whenever the prospect of battle loomed. In contrast, the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery and most notably their Colonel did not have the benefit of this gradual education. It is true that veteran regiments still participated in direct frontal assaults at Spottsylvania and Cold Harbor, but specifically after Cold Harbor these veteran regiments were more cautious and not as willing to participate in these charges by the time the Union Army had arrived in front of Petersburg.

With over 600 casualties out of the approximately 900 men that went into the charge, it appears that the cost of direct frontal assaults were even too much for Generals Grant and Meade. The charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery was the last assault made by Union forces during the opening days of the Petersburg Campaign. Upon hearing that the assault of the First Maine Heavy Artillery had failed, General Meade wrote to General Birney, “we have done all that is possible for men to do.”²²⁹ As a result, the Union Army prepared to lay siege to the city of Petersburg.

While the Union Army, including the First Maine Heavy Artillery settled into carrying out the siege operations, the impact of the charge upon the regiment was still clearly visible. To many members of the regiment, the charge on June 18 became the single most defining moment of their contributions to the war effort. To men like Frederick Low, Charles House, and House Shaw, defining and describing what happened

¹⁰²²⁸Bruce Catton, America Goes to War (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1958) 17-

¹¹²²⁹OR, XL Pt. 2 180.

to the regiment on that day in June, and finding out who had ordered the charge, were questions that needed to be answered in order to place the charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery into its proper historical context. Unfortunately, for the survivors of the First Maine Heavy Artillery, these questions were never answered sufficiently. Instead, the veterans eventually explained away any controversy regarding the disaster that had befallen their regiment by stating that they and their officers were only following orders. Additionally, the survivors of the regiment wanted to put the issue to rest and preferred to let Col. Chaplin, General Birney and others who had anything to do with ordering the charge left in peace and not dragged into an unanswerable argument.²³⁰

Sacrificing one's self, charging forward, even in the face of terrible odds, is a common theme in military history. Stories of the charge of the British Light Brigade at Balaklava were well known to the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. The poems and stories written about the ill-fated British calvary during this episode of the Crimean War influenced the perceptions of the survivors of the charge of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. These survivors viewed what had befallen their regiment in the same light as the "Charge of the Light Brigade." "It was a Balaklava of our own," wrote one survivor on the charge of June 18.²³¹

Comparing the Charge of June 18 to the Charge of the Light Brigade remained a constant theme throughout the postwar history of the survivors of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. Therefore, only those who had lived through the battle and risked paying the

12²³⁰ Frederick Low to Robert McAllister, January 17, 1871. Low Letters.

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14²³¹ Talbot, "A

ultimate sacrifice in pursuit of a desperate hope, could be fully embraced into the kinship of heroes that marked the survivors of the First Maine Heavy Artillery.

The effectiveness of direct frontal assaults, given the changing nature of Civil War combat, has been a topic of much debate in military history circles, but there is a part of the debate that a majority of historians can seem to agree on. The increased firepower of Civil War weapons and the increased effectiveness of field entrenchments gave tactical defense virtual dominance over the tactical offense, with the result that frontal assaults, no matter how brave and determined, generally ended in bloody failure, especially if delivered against an entrenched or otherwise fortified enemy. By the spring of 1864 the previous three years of war had proven this fact time and time again to the point that that commanders on both sides should have recognized this reality. It is clear from many quotes from soldiers in the Army of the Potomac, especially after the disaster of Cold Harbor, that they knew the hopelessness of direct frontal assaults.

According to studies of modern armies cited by James McPherson, units that suffered casualties equivalent to one-third of their strength are wrecked psychologically. While it would be hard to directly attribute these modern studies to Civil War armies there is evidence to suggest that some regiments of the Army of the Potomac had reached this breaking point by the time Grant's Army had arrived outside Petersburg in June of 1864. The fact that veteran regiments that had good reputations in battle refused to charge on June 18 points to the damaged mental state of the Army of the Potomac.²³²

This argument that suffering casualties over one-third damaged the mental state of military units and therefore affected the unit's combat effectiveness does not easily

apply to the First Maine Heavy Artillery. On May 19 the regiment suffered over 43 percent casualties of the number engaged at the Battle of Harris Farm, yet the members of the regiment remained committed enough to the cause to charge the enemy's works on June 18. Even after the charge of June 18, where the regiment suffered over 66.5 percent casualties of the number engaged, there was no immediate psychological breakdown or degree of disillusionment that resulted in the regiment's refusal to obey orders. By all accounts those who were still left in the First Maine Heavy Artillery actively participated in all future engagements. As Linderman explains, the physical embodiment of disillusionment, like refusing to charge, was hard to directly pinpoint in large groups. Instead, there are broader indications that point to a change in the mindset of the soldiers that caused them to begin to question their individual role in the course of the war. Although the First Maine had suffered tremendous casualties, including 357 battle deaths in less than 30 days, the physical wearing down of the regiment was over a relatively short period of time. This amount of time was not sufficient enough to completely wear down the psychological strength of the regiment as a whole. However, on an individual level, there were many members of the regiment who began to more closely question their motivations for fighting.²³³

In contrast, veteran regiments had seen their psychological strength worn down over time as they witnessed the ongoing stream of casualties brought about by the number of battles, engagements, and skirmishes they had been participating in since at least 1862. While the same motivations of bravery, honor and duty still bonded many of

15²³²McPherson, For Cause,

16²³³Linderman, Embattled Courage, 240. Civil War Book of Lists, 96 - 104.

these veterans to the cause of the Union there was a change in how these soldiers embraced their motivations. As Linderman describes, by the spring of 1864 these soldiers were now more cautious and tempered in their response to these motivations. A stronger motivation was the desire for self-preservation. Combat was no longer seen as an experience that would purify and strengthen individual character. Instead, soldiers began to view the threat of combat as something similar to a death plenty. While the seeds for this transformation or disillusionment were planted over the course of the first three years of the war it was the carnage suffered by such hard fighting units as the Union Army's Second Corps during the spring campaign of 1864 that brought this disillusionment to the surface. When the survivors of the Wilderness, Spottsylvania, and Cold Harbor came face to face with the trenches protecting Petersburg they were disillusioned enough to rebel against what they saw as useless sacrifice.²³⁴

Because they were not suffering under this same level of disillusionment the First Maine Heavy Artillery was selected to lead the charge on June 18. As previously quoted, letters from soldiers in the regiment indicate that the men still trusted in the leadership of Colonel Chaplin. It was not until after the disastrous charge that members of the regiment began to question their own motivations, the course of the war, and the leadership of Colonel Chaplin and the rest of the army.

This disillusionment was not limited to the men in the ranks of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. Colonel Chaplin himself appeared to embody the sense of disillusionment brought about by the charge. His reported lazy approach to getting his

²³⁴Linderman, Embattled Courage, 240 - 250.

men off the field, the impression he left on his fellow officers, and the reported carelessness he showed while inspecting the front line that led to his death are all indications that Chaplin was suffering from his own personal disillusionment. Chaplin's disillusionment can be defined as "a deeply depressive condition" that directly arose from the destruction of his regiment, the failure of other regiments to support the charge and the fact that his men went forward based on his order and more importantly based on the sense of trust he had built with his men. Chaplin saw the demolition of his own soldierly conceptions of honor, bravery, and sense of duty destroyed right before his eyes and it became too much of a crushing weight for him to bear.²³⁵

If the soldiers of the Army of the Potomac knew direct assaults against strongly held entrenchments were suicidal, and the commanders of the Union should have already seen plenty of evidence to prove this point, then why were direct frontal assaults ordered on the opening days of the Petersburg Campaign?

While there is no easy answer to this question there are some plausible reasons as to why commanders relied on the frontal assault even when there was enough evidence to indicate that the chances for success were slim at best. Alternatives to direct frontal assaults, such as flank attacks, were often more difficult to coordinate and carry out. With many commanders needing to bring relatively untested men into combat, the frontal assault became the only alternative. These commanders had much difficulty keeping their men in line and moving forward. To therefore, ask these same men to undertake more complex maneuvers at regiment or even company levels while under fire was not something most commanders were equipped to do, especially if their commands were still

19²³⁵Linderman, Embattled Courage, 240.

relatively new to the field such as the First Maine Heavy Artillery. No matter how foolish frontal attacks may seem today, the commander “who ordered them believed that they were the best if not the only way to achieve the sort of tactical success he wanted and in some cases needed to achieve” if the battle was to have the desired tactical or strategic outcome.²³⁶

Failing to recognize the tactical situation on the late afternoon of June 18, 1864, or worse yet failing to take any action to prevent needless slaughter, the Union Army Commanders from General Grant down through General Mott and Colonel Chaplin sacrificed the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery with devastating consequences. Could General Mott or Colonel Chaplin have prevented the destruction that befell the First Maine Heavy Artillery? That question is impossible to answer, but the fact remains that these men did not take action to prevent the situation.

This failure, in conjunction with Colonel Chaplin’s strict military bearing and his command’s willingness to follow the orders of their beloved Colonel, were the primary reasons for the First Maine Heavy Artillery’s earning such a bloody and tragic history that was unparalleled during the American Civil War. Since he joined the Union Army in 1861, Daniel Chaplin had developed into an effective and well-disciplined soldier, officer, and leader. Because he had not been actively involved in the course of the war for almost three years, he failed to recognize how the modernization of the weaponry had greatly changed the whole nature in which the war was being conducted. Colonel Chaplin remained consistent in his approach to military order and discipline and the men of the

20²³⁶ Albert E. Castel, Winning and Losing in the Civil War: Essays and Stories (Columbia, SC: University
21 of South Carolina Press, 1996)

regiment remained grounded in many of the same precepts that they had gone to war with in 1862. The course of the war had progressed to such a degree in 1864 that it invalidated many of initial precepts that the men of the First Maine Heavy Artillery had gone to with war in 1862. As a result the First Maine Heavy Artillery left a tragic legacy on the battlefields of Virginia. It is a legacy that is remembered today by a block of Maine granite on the battlefield at Petersburg, inscribed with names of over six hundred sons of Maine who sacrificed and suffered fighting for the Union, while always remaining committed to the ideals of duty, honor, and bravery.

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