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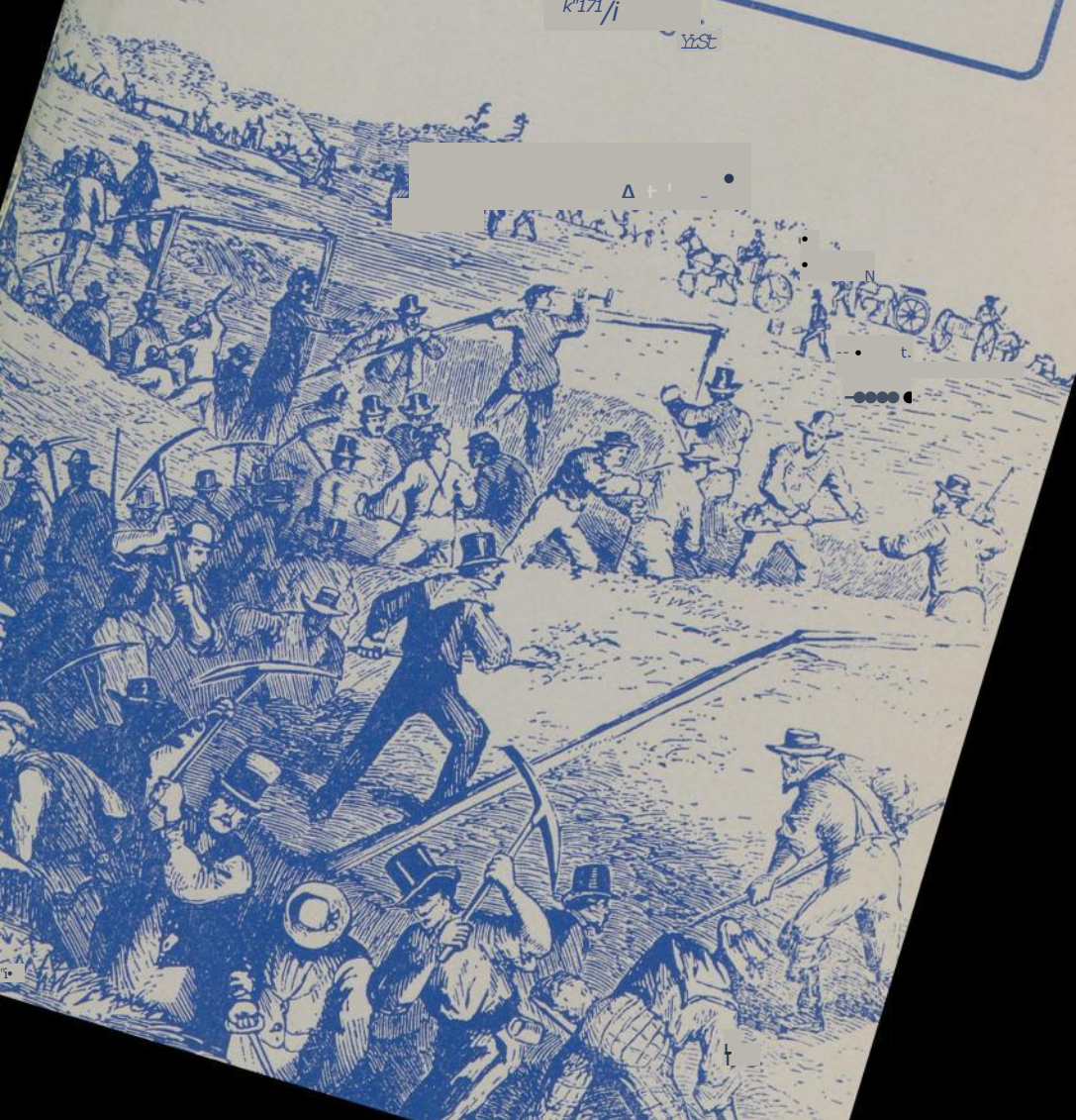
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# **Confederate Invasion of the West Shore                      1863**

By  
Robert Grant Crist

A paper presented before the Cumberland County Historical  
Society and Hamilton Library Association  
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Lemoine Trust Company welcomes the opportunity  
to publish this account of a crucial month in 1863  
when the eyes of the nation focused on the West Shore.

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BY

ROBERT GRANT CRUST

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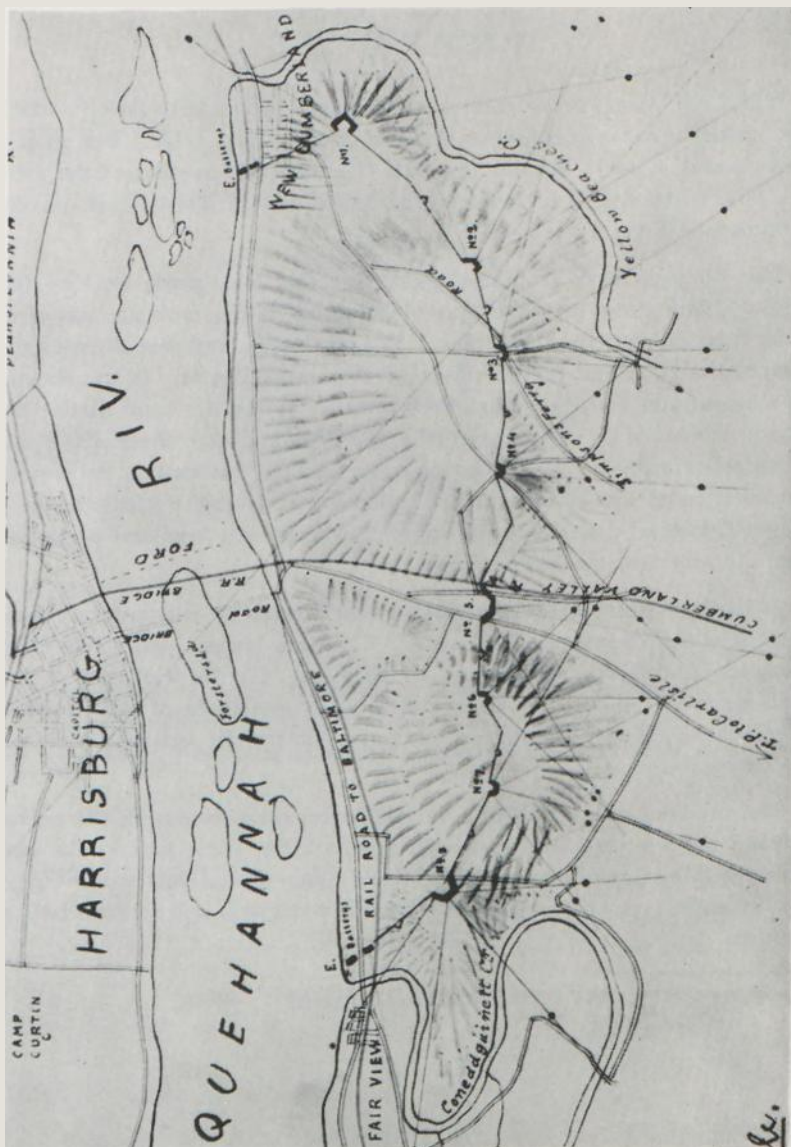
## P R E F A C E

With Civil War papers already a white plague, why add to the epidemic? The answer involves mention of another disease, local pride. But should we be proud or not? No one in a full 100 years has marshalled the facts of 1863, when the Confederate army rolled to the West Shore of the Susquehanna River.

This study proceeds from the assumption that local pride must be fed fact or it will grow fat on fiction. And most of the facts are scattered. Take Oyster Point, then and now. *Then* it was a fact that alarmed the Secretary of War and the President of the United States. It was the tip of a dagger aimed at the vitals of the nation. It was the front line of the war to thousands of subscribers to the *New York Times*, the *Philadelphia Press* and *Harper's*. *Now* scarcely a soul either locates the Point with precision or tells its story with perception. The savants do little better—a recent doctoral dissertation identified the Point as a headland projecting into the waters of the Susquehanna.

If the facts here do come through to the readers, it is because so many delightful people insisted and assisted: Christine Myers Crist, R. W. Crist, Hubertis Cummings, William C. Halfpenny, Charles Coleman Sellers and Raymond A. Wert. Three others gave graciously of their talents: William A. Hunter in guidance, W. S. Nye in insight and John E. Myers in encouragement.

But the book is written for a very little guy who lived with the project during its two years and his. Jeff tramped the forts, gazed wide-eyed through long interviews with old-timers and shared his room with a father and a typewriter while note became paragraph and scribble became citation.



In 1862 army engineers drew this sketch of their proposals for the defenses of Harrisburg. Eight strong points covered the principal roads. Original is in the National Archives.



## CHAPTER I

In 1863 the forward splash of the Confederate highwater dropped on Lowther Manor, ancient name for that part of Cumberland County immediately west of Harrisburg. Despite two weeks of flood warning, Pennsylvania was not prepared.

Typically swept from his footing was a resident of the Manor, W. H. H. Smith, who was visiting his brother-in-law, George Oyster, at a farmhouse which once stood facing west on what was later named County Club Road, one-half mile north of Oyster Point. Like so many of his Cumberland County neighbors he had enlisted and had been sent out of the area. Unlike others in June 1863, he happened to be home on furlough. "I was sitting on the back porch," Smith remembered, "leaning against the house about half asleep when I was discovered to be in the rebels' hands. They said, 'Yank, what are you doing here?' They took me up the pike about one mile west from there to where my Uncle John Sherban lived [on the hill over Orr's Bridge] to the headquarters of the Confederate General Jenkins . . ." <sup>1</sup>

William Henry Harrison Smith, more than one likes to admit, typified the people left in the counties along the Susquehanna and bordering the Mason-Dixon Line in June 1863—at home slumbering in the sun blandly accepting the invasion. With the highwater mark of the Confederate advance being set there on a porch, one mile and three furlongs from the capital of Pennsylvania, some of the community slept. With one-third of Lee's army in Cumberland County, much of Central Pennsylvania leaned on its pitchfork, raised the price of its shoddy and apathetically watched the militia of New York rush to the defense of the capital of the Keystone State.

The threat of war, of course, was not new to the Valley. The previous autumn units designated the "1st" through "25th Emergency" Regiments had rushed to Harrisburg. Places of business had ceased functioning in mid-afternoon so that employees could drill.

Engineers in 1862 had drafted elaborate plans for a chain of forts linking the Conodoguinet and Yellow Breeches Creeks, and certain work may have been begun on the ground to dig trenches on the height of land at the western end of the river bridges.<sup>2</sup> Tenting there, a Pennsylvania Zouave regiment found war on its campground one foggy night when a Cumberland Valley Railroad train ploughed into a shifting engine and spilled fifty-eight casualties into the murk. Otherwise, the war did not

reach the area, and the militia returned home safely to await the paychecks which never came.

When June 1863 began, the war was still long marches from Harrisburg. For a fortnight the Valley farmers eagerly watched the hay ripen in a rising market spurred by army buying. Meanwhile, they took fresh peas and butter at eighteen cents per pound into Carlisle Market House.<sup>3</sup> Across High Street Sheriff Thomas Rippey checked a cell where he held a female infanticide.<sup>4</sup> On to the east where the High became the Mud Road, Henry Irvine watched other young women of Irving Female College, in Mechanicsburg, prepare for their final examinations in geometry, mental and moral philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

Five miles farther the Mud Road, here known as Trindle Spring Road, joined the Carlisle and Harrisburg Turnpike at a V-shaped intersection which after 1814 became known as Oyster Point for the Tavern operated there by the Oyster family.<sup>6</sup> Here began White Hall, named for the large Academy which until 1863 had operated in the little village. To the delight of Polly Oyster and the fifteen other households, Professor David Denlinger had recently switched to merchandising and opened a general store in the Academy building. The hamlet ended three hundred yards farther east at the square home built by Robert Whitehill at modern 19th Street. After a mile of open country the Turnpike emptied into Bridgeport, fourteen buildings at the western end of the Camelback Bridge to Harrisburg! Here an old sawmill had just been renovated for six families to occupy, and a tavern operated.

Across the covered bridge lay a quiet capital hardly aware of the few soldiers garrisoned beyond its northern boundary at Camp Curtin. The news in the city was the market building which William Verbeke was constructing in West Harrisburg nine blocks south of the Camp and the lantern show offered nightly to the east at the "State Lunatic Asylum."

Into Harrisburg on June 8 slipped Frank Blair, former member of Andrew Jackson's "Kitchen Cabinet" and now presumably the harbinger of information which would soon affect every citizen, from W. H. H. Smith to Sheriff Rippey, but particularly old Polly Oyster and Professor Denlinger. Blair conferred in Harrisburg with its most famous citizen, the ousted Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, before hastening back to Washington.<sup>6</sup> Two days later orders sped out of the War Department creating a new Military Department of the Susquehanna with boundaries extending from the peak of the Alleghenies at Johnstown eastward to the Delaware River. Appointed commander was Major General Darius Nash Couch, a West Pointer with the fervent wish to serve, but not under Joseph Hooker, commander of the Army of the Potomac.<sup>7</sup> Couch carried instructions to expand his forces from the 250 invalids convalescing at



Harrisburg and York into an entire army corps. With him came only paper power, no manpower. The War Department chose to keep its experienced troops with Hooker squatting stubbornly between Lee and Lincoln.

Arriving in Harrisburg June 11, Couch conferred with Governor Andrew G. Curtin and departed for Chambersburg to establish a field headquarters athwart the presumed invasion route. He needed no special insight into the mind of Lee to know that the Confederates would use the Cumberland Valley to invade the North. In fact, both North and South had already made extensive preparations for such an eventuality. In 1861 engineers employed by the Philadelphia Home Guard had surveyed the Susquehanna Region thoroughly, assuming that the enemy would eventually encounter that area after their ride up the Valley. In their study of the river barrier from Duncannon to the Chesapeake Bay, the engineers concluded that the most feasible place to cross would be at Harrisburg, where there were two bridges and a ford. They observed: "The Cumberland Valley Turnpike is a fine, wide road. . . . The Ford at Harrisburg was two feet deep at low water with excellent, smooth, sandy and stone bottom. . . . It starts from a red stone on the [East) shore a little below the railroad bridge and makes a direction for the lower part of Forster's Island. After the Island the crossing is almost dry shod . . ." 11

General Lee, utilizing an agent, Jedediah Hotchkiss, who knew the Valley intimately, as early as February 1863 directed the preparation of maps of the approach route which would lead him to the nearest Northern capital, Harrisburg. Hotchkiss pieced together several maps from civilian sources, including the H. F. Bridgens Company 1858 Map of Cumber-



Oyster Point Tavern about 1900 when it had become a home for the Clarence Hempt family. Trindle Spring Road met Market Street at a V-shaped intersection in front of this structure.

land County, so that the Confederate troop commanders rode into the North with documents showing both the road network and the stream patterns, as well as the location of virtually every farmhouse and blacksmith shop.<sup>12</sup>

The route, therefore, was assumed by both sides. The surprise came in the timing. Writing about the crossing of the border, the editor of the Greencastle *Pilot* explained that the people had become accustomed to the warnings and were banking on the experience of the previous year when Longstreet had taken a full week to march the twenty-four miles from Frederick to Hagerstown. When he looked up from his printery stone and saw Lieutenant General Richard Ewell riding past in a carriage reading a map and "looking pale and delicate," the editor was flabbergasted at the pace of the advance.<sup>18</sup>

President Abraham Lincoln reacted June 15 to the crossing of the Mason-Dixon Line by issuing a proclamation which called the Pennsylvania militia into the national service. Simultaneously he appealed to the Governors of New Jersey, New York, Maryland, Ohio and West Virginia to provide help. Then, as if to confound the President and justify the hesitation of the Pennsylvania farmers to enlist, the threat disappeared.

In its first phase, thus, the invasion was but a two-day cavalry raid directed by Brigadier General Albert Gallatin Jenkins, whose brigade of men had been detached from "Jeb" Stuart's command and given to Ewell as a reconnaissance force. Jenkins on June 15 rode north through Chambersburg to Scotland, half way to Shippensburg, where he burned a bridge to hamper the ability of the defenders to reinforce any troops which they might send toward the border via the Cumberland Valley Railroad. Hearing that forces were approaching on the 17th, Jenkins faded back almost to the State line. He need not have withdrawn. The units consisted only of the ambulatory cases among Couch's 250 invalid troops, who limped as far as Shippensburg, and Stanwood's "Regulars."<sup>14</sup> The latter were "regular" only in that they had enlisted for long-term service but were still recruits awaiting uniforms and assignment at the Carlisle Barracks.

In New York the organized militia regiments missed the news of Jenkins' withdrawal. Mobilization machinery had begun cranking out men for Pennsylvania and worked without ceasing.<sup>15</sup> Within forty-eight hours two regiments were in Harrisburg; within ten days, twenty regiments and 12,091 men.<sup>16</sup> First to bounce into the capital, via the Camden and Amboy and the Pennsylvania Railroads, were the two National Guard regiments which became the First Brigade. Both had turned out for the Battle of Bull Run two years before, where the London *Times* correspondent spoke the highest praise of the performance of one. Both

retained a substantial nucleus of veteran soldiers. Both drilled regularly in their New York City armories. The 8th Regiment, known as the "Washington Grays" since 1847,<sup>17</sup> dated from 1808 and continued into the 1950's as the 258th Field Artillery Battalion.<sup>18</sup> The 371 men who made the trip to Harrisburg June 17 served under Colonel Joshua M. Varian, who initially doubled as Brigade commander. Distinguishing the 71st Regiment were their blue uniforms and black belts. They made a point of enlisting for ninety days rather than the thirty of other regiments. Colonel Benjamin Trafford commanded the 737 men who ultimately reached Cumberland County.<sup>19</sup>

On June 18 the people of Harrisburg looked out their shop windows to see the 23rd Regiment of New Jersey march into the southern end of town. Their Colonel, E. Burd Grubb, formerly of Lancaster County, supervised their digging "Fort Yahoo" in Harris Park, before they departed for home. Their three days' service in Central Pennsylvania was reported in their regimental history as an unpleasant experience because of the cool attitude of the civilian population."

June 19 saw a Brooklyn Regiment, the 23rd New York State National Guard, Colonel William Everdell commanding, disembarking in a rain storm which soaked the gray uniforms on the march to the heights above Bridgeport.<sup>2</sup> Delayed because they had a band and were paraded in Philadelphia, was the sister regiment, the 22nd, which arrived June 20. This unit was under the command of 33-year-old Colonel Lloyd Aspinwall,



Picture taken, presumably during the 1863 invasion, of the encampment on the hill which was surmounted by Fort Washington. The houses in the right center faced each other across Market Street, approximately at modern 5th Street. At extreme left freight cars of the C.V.R.R. are visible. A Currier & Ives artist used this photograph to make a popular print labeled "Cumberland Valley."

who had helped to organize it two years before with the assistance of a \$16,435 contribution from several banks and insurance companies. The 22nd wore army blouses and trousers with a gray cap, army brogans and Enfield rifles bought in England.<sup>22</sup>

Arriving with the 22nd were their brigade mates, the 11th and 37th Regiments. The former was an artillery command without artillery, and the latter a unit of infantry 693-strong under Colonel Charles Roome. The 52nd and 56th soon arrived to be brigaded with the 23rd. A dozen other New York units came to Harrisburg, but those who served on the West Shore battlefield were the 8th, 11th, 22nd, 23rd, 37th, 52nd, 56th and 71st, all National Guard.<sup>23</sup>

Couch first manned the forts above Bridgeport but later ordered units such as the 12th, 13th and 28th Regiments into Perry County to do picket duty and to man defenses that had been hastily *dug* at the two railroad bridges which spanned the Susquehanna at Marysville. Here marching over and sleeping on Perry County shale were hundreds of city boys, including the fanatic Boston Corbett, who later shot John Wilkes Booth. Perhaps he got satisfaction in strutting the streets of Duncan-non, home town of the father of the vice president of the Confederacy, but his chance of confronting a Southern soldier there was very small, although not non-existent.<sup>24</sup> Unofficial accounts tell of the presence of scattered Southern squads combing the area, the official reports told of "bush-wackers under former officers defending the Perry County mountain passes." The 65th and 75th Regiments were even sent as far as Mount Union in Huntingdon County, which some thought would be an intermediate goal for Lee, who was by some supposed to be making a semi-circular pass through the Commonwealth on a large-scale raid. Tellico Johnson, of Bellefonte, for example, told Penn State students after the War that he had marched sixty undergraduates to "The Shades of Death" south of Huntingdon where they erected a barricade and intercepted a small party of Confederate scavengers.<sup>25</sup>

In any event, New York responded brilliantly to Lincoln's call. Not only did organized regiments of pre-enlisted men rush to Harrisburg, but also others volunteered to fill the ranks. Thus did forty employees of the New York *Herald* respond to a plea from their own correspondent: "We want men." They became the "Herald Guard" of the 11th Regiment. Even more would have been ordered into Central Pennsylvania if they had been needed, as can be deduced from a passage in the 7th Regimental History: ". . . at Philadelphia we received orders to report to Baltimore, that city being in danger of an attack and its successful defense being of more importance than Harrisburg." <sup>26</sup>

## CHAPTER II

In Pennsylvania the pace was more leisurely. Governor Curtin on June 12 had appealed to the male citizens of the State to enlist in Couch's Corps, but there had been little response. Complicating the matter was the fact that Couch was attempting simultaneously to raise troops for two components: for the Regular Army by stimulating three-year volunteer enlistments, and for "Department Corps troops" by encouraging the creation of organized reserve components who would be subject to call. Then, on June 15, while two previous calls were still ringing, President Lincoln asked for a third body of men, 100,000 militia of the Northern States to serve a six-month term. The newspapers analyzed the feeling rather well in pointing out that "The State and general governments are at cross purposes" <sup>1</sup> and elsewhere that "The rush to arms would have been better if the call had come from the State not the general government." <sup>2</sup>

Governor Curtin attempted to unravel the confusion but may have added to it. From his office, and later from inside the various camps themselves, he issued such advice as "trust your government" and "I accept men without reference to the six month term."

His principal duties in June seemed to be his attempts to separate the home-bound patriot from his pitchfork. He went to extraordinary ends to deal with delegations from militia companies, offering his personal assurances that they need not serve too long nor too far from home. Despite his personal interventions several thousand militia returned home before they could be sent to Harrisburg. The Philadelphia *North American* on June 22 reported that the Governor was "mortified that men were asking for transportation home before any troops had been moved toward the enemy."

To Philadelphia he sent a letter suggesting that the city could be better defended on the Susquehanna than on the Schuylkill, asserting "You have not responded . . . close your businesses and come." <sup>3</sup> Mixing with the men at Camp Curtin he promised that duty would last only "while danger is imminent" and that he would send them home at the end of the emergency.<sup>4</sup> Some of the men who received this promise sought him out a second time to gain an even more specific promise that "he should judge of the emergency [not somebody in Washington] and they would not be deceived." <sup>5</sup>

Epitomizing the mobilization morass were the "Philadelphia Grays." [11]

An advance contingent arrived in Harrisburg June 16 but notified Adjutant General Alexander Russell "at his home on the river bank" that they would not serve the national government. On the other hand, they could not serve the State government because it had no money to feed or pay them. A harried Governor parried with this regiment for ten days. When the invasion had reached Polly Oyster's parlor they consented to serve, but only after the Secretary of War himself had promised to "muster out Pennsylvania forces as soon as the public necessities permit." <sup>6</sup>

By the last week in June the Governor, in extremity, had issued another proclamation, this time somewhat pitifully imploring Pennsylvania "not to leave the defense to men of other states." The Adjutant General sent orders to the railroads to "pass any able-bodied man with a musket desirous of going to Harrisburg." Newspapers rallied loyally. Rearing up on June 19 the Carlisle *Herald* cried: "Discard criminal lethargy and enlist! Should we sit by in stupid imbecility losing our birthrights as free men ? Rather a thousand deaths than such unspeakable ignominy. . . ." Said the Huntingdon *Journal-American*: "Let us drive the vile hordes which threaten to destroy our fair fields and murder our citizens." Warned the Lancaster *Express*: "It were madness to falter and hesitate until the foe is dealing destruction around our homes."

The Lebanon *Advertiser* put it this way: "A terrible crime is upon us. It is the duty of every Pennsylvanian to contribute whether in men or money, to repel the invaders from the soil." From the Lewistown *True Democrat* came the word: "Lincoln's call is three weeks too late, but let every able-bodied man who can possibly leave his home at this time rally to arms." Even the *Presbyterian Banner*, ordinarily concerned with fund drives for the College of New Jersey and the inter-parish peregrinations of solemn parsons, stole room for a mention of the threat to the State.

In Harrisburg the technique for rallying the town, as it was in Carlisle and in other county seats, was to call a public meeting in the court house. Involved were Mayor A. S. Roumfort; Governor Andrew Curtin; his factional opponent, Simon Cameron ; and professionally neutral General Couch, a New Yorker who was appropriately silent at the politically-scented meeting of his elders (but who later ran for Governor of Massachusetts).

At 11 a.m. the meeting convened, with Cameron both presiding and monopolizing the proceedings. That which survives is chiefly a list of various assertions by the former Secretary of War.

- (1) Lee will not be foolish enough to invade as far as Harrisburg.
- (2) I pledge my entire fortune to pay for the defense of the city and [



Currier & Ives made this print showing a camp within Fort Washington. The Camel Back Bridge runs off to the right. The domed structure on the left is the old State Capitol.

will personally pay the expense of placing the 127th Regiment back in service.

(3) The Governor should personally lead the militia as commander-in-chief.

(4) I will shoulder a musket and go myself as a private under the Governor.?

As to a fifth assertion, a dispute arose among newspaper editors as to what Cameron had said. Those who were most loyal to him reported that he had asserted that he would serve under McClellan or Franklin or any other general organizing the defense.<sup>8</sup> Others, less friendly, quoted him to the effect that he wanted General McClellan to organize the defenses. McClellan, who like Cameron had been fired by President Lincoln, would have been an ally in forming a new political bloc, when not performing military duties. In fact, eighteen months later McClellan carried both Harrisburg and Cumberland County against Lincoln in the contest for the presidency. However, in the emergency Cameron disassociated himself from such chicanery by firing a telegram to supporters in Philadelphia: "I authorize you to say I made no such proposition."<sup>9</sup>

For his part the Governor read an appeal from a State hero, General Heintzelman, who was helping defend the national capital. His letter reached this apogee: "Great God, can we stand idle! . . . 35,000 Pennsylvanians have fallen in battle. Revenge them!"<sup>10</sup>

The Commanding General kept his counsel, merely reminding his audience that he would prefer not to divulge his plans because of the possibility that a spy would be present in the room.



From the meeting seem to have come at least two results: (1) Colonel Boas's resolution pledging the "last dollar and last man in defense of the State in this emergency";<sup>11</sup> and (2) a mass response to the request that 1,000 citizens help dig entrenchments to defend the city.

Before noting what 1,000 diggers did to the landscape, look for a minute at the pledge to produce "the last man in defense." Eight Pennsylvania regiments, the 20th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st and 33rd were formed under the same Lincoln call of June 15 which produced more than twice that number from New York.<sup>12</sup> They were designated "Emergency Troops" to distinguish them from the 32nd and the 34th to 60th Regiments which were formed in response to a final plea from Governor Curtin on June 26. These latter units were designated "Three Months Men." All came to Harrisburg after the invasion threat had faded, except the 32nd, the "Philadelphia Grays," which arrived in time but refused muster under the terms of the June 15 call.

If there was lethargy in some towns, there was fervor in at least one—the little town then called Fairview where the Conodoguinet empties into the Susquehanna opposite Camp Curtin. Perhaps it was the daily reminder of the white tents visible across the river. Perhaps not, but by 1863 the town of ninety voters had sent forty-five men to war, not including sixty-five others who had performed militia duties.<sup>13</sup> In all corners of the Commonwealth, Fairview was cited as the example to follow.

Slowly Pennsylvania units began to arrive in Harrisburg. Some of the first were recruited in the Harrisburg area, the veterans of the 127th Regiment under Colonel W. W. Jennings, for example, who reconstituted themselves the 26th Emergency Regiment. Mechanicsburg sent the "Russell Light Cavalry" under Captain Singiser and Newville a unit under Captain Sharp. A "captain" was anybody capable of cajoling forty men into a short enlistment. A "first lieutenant" received his commission for dragooning twenty-five men on similar terms. Fifteen head got a man a "second lieutenancy." From "Lewisburg University" came men and from Lafayette College a group who spent one pleasant afternoon on Front Street visiting a former professor and singing old campus songs. Gettysburg College furnished a company of "immensely patriotic" boys under the leadership of a theological student whose previous military experience had consisted of a 90-day hitch. Dickinson College continued its examinations until late June, but at least one student joined the defenders in the Forts and there persuaded the Lewisburg boys to petition Sigma Chi for a chapter charter.<sup>14</sup> Out of the past shuffled seventeen veterans of the War of 1812. After marching to the Capitol they conferred with Governor Curtin and asked for duty in the trenches. The grizzled group, whose ages ran from 68 to 76, carried a flag which

their fathers had borne at the Battle of Trenton in 1777.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast with the New York units, which had been drilling regularly, owned their own uniforms and operated under regimental and brigade staffs, the Pennsylvania Emergency Regiments were untrained, without uniforms in the beginning and serving under officers as inexperienced as the men. Typical of the "companies" offered Couch were those organized by the clerks of the State government, by the employees of the Harrisburg *Telegraph* and by the workers of the McCormick Rolling Mills. With their employers or foremen in the lead, they marched in what they presumed to be rank and file out of the factory and into Camp Curtin.<sup>16</sup> Such a mobilization procedure threw the civilian economy out of kilter. For example, the *Telegraph* ceased publication, as did the Carlisle *Herald*.\*

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\* As State Librarian the *Telegraph* editor supervised the evacuation of 28,000 volumes and five portraits of former governors. This prompted the Lewistown *True Democrat* to write: "The Governor sent the pictures away but not himself. Our worthy Governor probably thought the work of art more valuable than the work of nature."



**Western section of the Camel Back Bridge taken before 1902 from Forster's Island. Fort Washington was built on the high land to the left to deny the invaders access to this bridge and the C.V.R.R. bridge which lay a few yards downstream. In the background is the Walnut Street Bridge built in the 'eighties.**

## CHAPTER III

As for the second promise made at the Harrisburg public meeting, the "true citizens" of town unquestionably started digging on a grand scale. cursory reading of the camp names suggests that the capital nestled behind a vast complex of installations. Such was not the case. The criteria for a camp or fort were simple. A camp was a place where a unit stopped, if for only one night. The camp could then become a fort after a minor amount of *digging*.

Most permanent and substantial in size was Camp Curtin, a replacement depot or reception center. It was simply a tent city sprawling out over six square blocks of land in North Harrisburg, commanded by a one-legged colonel who later became Governor James A. Beaver.<sup>1</sup> Camp Haley was a plot where the Central YMCA now stands, then the edge of the city, and Camp Cameron lay a mile or two east of the city, inappropriately located considering its name, on the road to the poorhouse. Camp Couch lay near "Runkle's Barn" in Penbrook, a minor cavalry camp which was re-named "Camp Brisbane" late in June to distinguish it from Fort Couch, a separate installation west of the Susquehanna.<sup>2</sup>

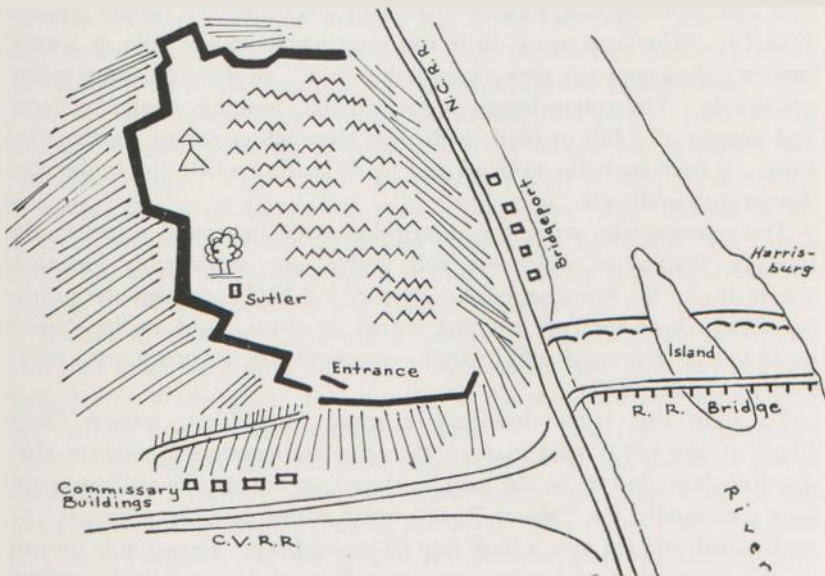
Couch chose to defend Harrisburg from the West Shore. In that section were dug at his direction several minor works and a major one, the sixty-acre Fort Washington which overlooked the Camelback and railroad bridges into the capital city. In 1861 Pleasonton's engineers had recommended "at the first appearance of danger Hummel Hill should be occupied and fortified. . . . It is well situated for a large encampment, and the same eminence on each side [would be] well situated for the location of flanking batteries." <sup>3</sup>

"Hummel Hill," named for its owners the Hummel family, who after the war sought to collect damages for two years of governmental occupancy, enters the records also as "Bridgeport Heights" for the town under the bluff at its base.

Just precisely when work started on Fort Washington remains unclear. The *Telegraph* of September 11, 1862, said that "a number of competent engineers are here to complete the fortifications," but it seems most likely that the completion of the *design*, not of the *construction* is to be inferred. David F. Eyster, of Camp Hill, writing in 1879, said that engineers had staked out positions early in 1863 and completed the work in June.<sup>4</sup> The Departmental engineer, Captain J. B. Wheeler, credited Captain R. I. Dodge, of the 8th Infantry, U. S. A., with the design.<sup>5</sup> In any event, (16)

a Pennsylvania Railroad engineer, John H. Wilson, was summoned to the site in the late afternoon of June 15. He told his diary that he "went with Captain Dodge to hill west of River and laid out fortifications—got work started—worked men all night." <sup>6</sup> Using hand tools alone, the men found the task unusually difficult because of the nature of the soil—shale with very little overburden. At first the diggers were white-collar workers, but members of the laboring classes soon took over the work. There was at least one casualty. Louis Drexler, losing his way home, plunged sixty feet to his death at the bottom of the Northern Central Railroad cut that borders the fort.

To collect additional volunteers Simon Cameron called a second meeting for late in the afternoon of June 16. The *New York Times* said that in one day's work "three parallels of rifle pits were completed, and other works are now in progress with 600 men working." Captain Wheeler reached the site on June 20 to find the work so close to completion that



This is a redrawing by Merle T. Westlake of a sketch made in 1863 by Pvt. Henry Wirt Schriver in a letter written from Fort Washington to his family. The redrawing adds no pen strokes to the original, which is too faint to be reproduced here. He did not include the two lines of rifle pits which were dug "some hundred feet or so in front of the fort, down the slope," as remembered by Corporal Robert Welsh, of the 33rd Pennsylvania Regiment.

he did not order any changes in the design despite the fact that he considered it faulty in concept. He asked for 1,000 barrels for the fort, which the Citizens Fire Company, using Negro laborers, filled by pumping in river water through 1,000 feet of hose. Private Samuel Pennypacker complained that the contents "tasted of coal oil which previously had been stored in the hogsheads." <sup>9</sup> Wheeler also strung telegraph lines into the forts.

With Captain Wheeler's carefully made drawing of the forts (superimposed on crudely drawn road networks) and a rough sketch made on the spot by Private Henry Wirt Shriver, Fort Washington and Fort Couch can be accurately described. (See illustrations pp. 17 and 23.) The former was a self-contained unit with a ramp leading up to it, which is 100 years later traceable on the ground. Across this ramp hung wooden gates. Inside were long rows of wedge tents, separated by company streets running east-west so that June sunshine would not enter the shelters. Also shown on the Shriver map are a headquarters tent and a shelter for the army sutler.

A contemporary word picture of the Fort was made by a *Herald* reporter June 19: "The forts are a ditch and entrenchments one mile in length, constructed so guns can sweep approaches to it. Abatis are formed where practicable. The entrenchment is semicircular, running along the slopes and summit of a hill or bluff, with each termination resting on the river bank. It commands the railroad and roads leading south, the bridge and district surrounding it."

The reporter who wrote the description erred in several respects: the trenches, termini of which are still visible, are considerably less than a mile apart; the historian of the 22nd N.Y.S.N.G. said that the principal drawback of the fort was that it had *no* abatis; and artillery pieces could not be depressed sufficiently to command the important road intersections on the flanks.

To right this latter deficiency a small installation, termed "Fort Clay" on the 1872 Atlas map of the area but mentioned nowhere else, may have been dug.<sup>10</sup> In the location shown on the map its artillery could have commanded the "Moore Road" which rolled past the principal fort to the north and led over a bluff into Wormleysburg. Suspicion is thrown on this representation for two reasons. First, it is mentioned nowhere else and was not depicted by either Wheeler or by Shriver. Second, the same cartographer who is the sole source for "Fort Clay" on the same map erred in the size, shape and location of Fort Washington. He apparently did not actually traverse the terrain but guessed about certain features.

On June 28 General Couch officially named the principal complex Fort

Washington, invoking the name of the first President perhaps because an issue had to be settled between New Yorkers, who had formerly dubbed it Fort Seymour, and the Pennsylvanians, who referred to it as Fort Couch. Intriguingly the Philadelphia *Press* on June 17 spoke of it as being on "Hummel's Hill, across the Susquehanna and which it will be remembered was one of the sites proposed for the national Capitol. . . ."

Besides the tents, there was little else inside the trenches and parapets, except platforms for some of the artillery which had been scraped together for the defenders. These platforms "were depressed from eighteen inches to two feet below the rampart, which was constructed of a soil made up of equal parts of loam and fragments of rock." <sup>11</sup>

Second among the forts was that installation marked by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission as Fort Couch about half a mile west of Fort Washington on the same spine of high ground. According to Captain Wheeler, Fort Couch was designed by Major James Brady of the Pennsylvania Volunteer Artillery. It was necessary that a position be manned here to deny the enemy possession. From it descending fire would have made the major position untenable. On the 24th Wilson wrote in his diary, "rifle pits must be dug in the outer hill." On the same day the *Patriot and Union* mentioned "large numbers of workmen are in ditches in front of the escarpments and others on the hill beyond." The *Press* on June 26 mentioned minor works and rifle pits . . . thrown up beyond the chief parallels to form a sort of refuge for stragglers and retreating troops." This again was probably Fort Couch, as shown on Wheeler's sketch of August 31, 1863. Today five "jogs" remain of the seven shown in the sketch. The best guess seems to be that Fort Couch really was never completed, but was only "partially entrenched but not enough for effectiveness," as one contemporary put it.

Writing in 1908 the Cumberland County genealogist Jeremiah Zeamer said that there were three forts . . . "the eastern and principal one was named Fort Washington; the next one to the westward Fort Couch, and the farthest one was left without a name." <sup>12</sup> This says unequivocally "three" and implies that they were aligned east-west, but the third fort is something of a mystery, unless the questionable Fort Clay, which is not in an east-west line, is to be counted the third. There is no trace of a third fort on the ground, and the ground for the most part has escaped bulldozing and construction. Wheeler showed no third fort. On the other hand, logic suggests that a military engineer would have erected a defensive position, if time had permitted, somewhere near the highest part of land to the west of and on the same ridge as the other two forts. Enemy occupation of this site would have made Fort Couch, in turn, untenable. Perhaps time permitted only minor earthen installations which were soon obliterated.

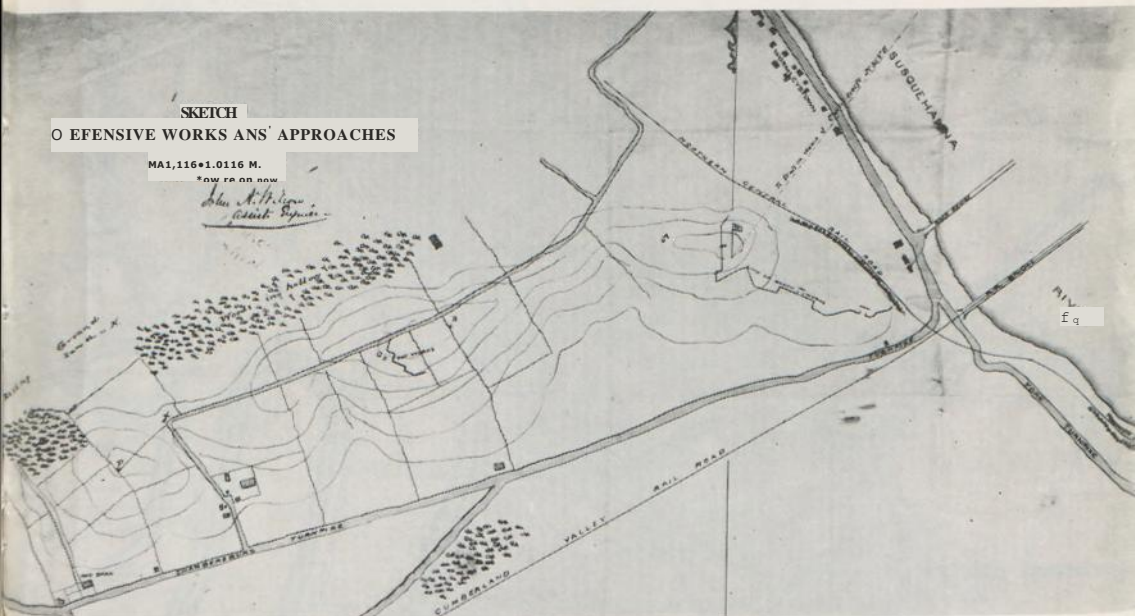
Such removal of the evidence on the earth occurred at the one other location on the West Shore where extensive defensive works were dug. This was the complex of rifle pits and trenches scratched into the earth near the intersection of what has become Sixteenth Street, New Cumberland, and the Northern Central Railroad line which skirts the Susquehanna. In 1863 here ran the road to York. To protect the intersection and to provide flank guard for the forts over Bridgeport, the military commander on June 20 sent two regiments to man the area.<sup>13</sup> Here they established what went under three names: "Camp Cox," "Camp Russell" and "Camp Taylor." It was a defensive post suggested by the professional engineer Captain Wheeler, who "had the frames made, the lines paced out and work commenced when it became known that the rebels were in full retreat. I immediately gave orders to stop the work. . . ." 14

Half a dozen other minor defensive points were prepared by the Pennsylvania Railroad. In that era of loping laissez faire the plenipotentiary of the P.R.R. was a quasi-official consultant to the government. Chosen for the job was Thomas A. Scott, who later became president of the Company and who had been Cameron's assistant secretary of war. For the Department Commander he was an entire general staff. As G-1 he imported whole trainloads of laborers, when the "1,000 true citizens" wilted. As a G-2 he sent private spies, such as William B. Wilson, south to the Potomac to watch Lee and telegraph intelligence. As a G-3 he raced back and forth between Governor and President, Commander and Secretary of War. Finally, as G-4 he provided expert engineering talent: Wilson, for example.<sup>15</sup>

Scott placed rifle pits at critical points on the railroad route, such as near the deep cut at Bridgeport, the narrows at Marysville and the bridge at Rockville. He turned the engine house beneath the Bridgeport bluff into a fortress, piercing the masonry walls for gun ports. (See illustration p. 27.) Several neighboring buildings, with their owners' reluctant consent, were also fortified, but one lady sent word to the engineers that *she* did not want her trees cut down. "Our engineer, without arresting the destructive process, sends back his compliments and advises the unterrified female to remove herself and her traps to the other side of the river." <sup>26</sup>

What did they achieve? Civilian sources termed the forts "formidable," and the Philadelphia *North American*, "impregnable." <sup>17</sup> Military opinion was less sanguine. The Landis artillerymen, noting the shale sides of the trenches which the engineers had intended to cover with sod but never did, predicted flatly: "Had an attack been accompanied by shell, those bits of rocks would have proved more destructive than volleys of musketry — a single shell bursting on any portion of the glacis would have con-

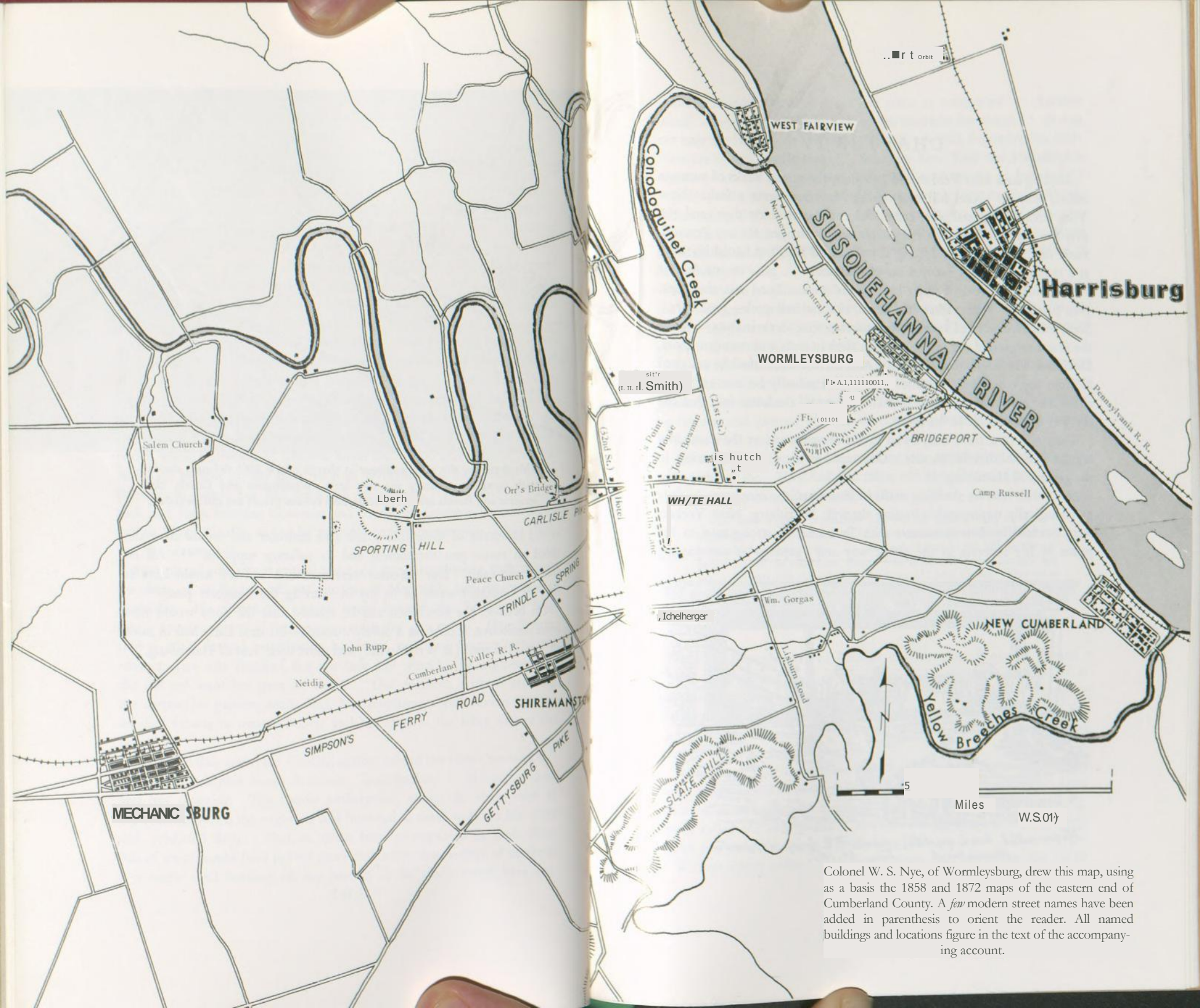




This sketch by the army engineer in charge of the 1863 defenses shows with complete accuracy the two forts, Washington and Couch, but streams and streets are not in scale, and certain places are misidentified.

verted hundreds of them into grape and cannister and would have disabled an entire gun detachment and its infantry supports." <sup>18</sup> An infantry unit said: "Our defenses were wretched and we would have to flee." <sup>19</sup> Another wrote of its joy in "leaving the slaughter pen." <sup>20</sup>

On balance, the conclusion can be reached that the forts would have been ineffective, if only for a different reason—General Early had in mind to "cross the river [at Wrightsville] and move up in rear of Harrisburg." <sup>21</sup>



Colonel W. S. Nye, of Wormleysburg, drew this map, using as a basis the 1858 and 1872 maps of the eastern end of Cumberland County. A few modern street names have been added in parenthesis to orient the reader. All named buildings and locations figure in the text of the accompanying account.

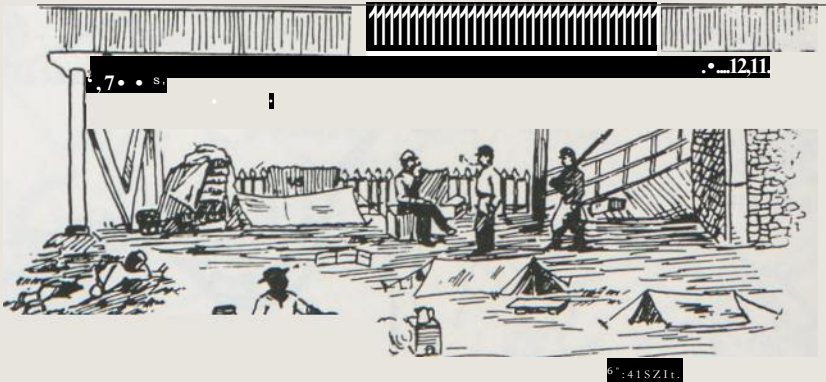


## CHAPTER IV

Looking back after Verdun and Iwo Jima, the several weeks of summer militia duty on a cool hill overlooking Harrisburg seem a lark. New York troops in general were committed for a mere thirty days, and the fifty-five day tour of the 20th Regiment was the longest for any Pennsylvania unit. Overtones of lurking danger added zest, but hardships were at a minimum: "Bugs annoyed me considerably . . . galls on my feet" ;<sup>1</sup> . . . "refused canteens of water by civilians";<sup>2</sup> etc. Food was abundant, even palatable. Pennypacker ate "beans, rice and salt pork—good fare." Some men even secreted sweet butter and cool wine in their tents.<sup>3</sup> After the first disorganized day or two the men slept in tents with wooden floors. Discipline was neighborly. "When a man became dissatisfied he resigned as from any other club." <sup>4</sup> One New Yorker actually became rapturous about the view from the camp,<sup>5</sup> and a reporter told the home folk that the site was the healthiest in the area.<sup>a</sup>

There was time for a daily swim in the Susquehanna or the canal and regular half-holidays in the city. One could enjoy a Havana sitting in the gardens of Harrisburg.

Not unlike reserves shedding mufti in later wars, the men came to duty psychologically unprepared. Passing through Harrisburg, New Yorkers were incensed by their encounters with "hundreds of strong men in the prime of life loitering in the public way and [gaping) at our passing



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columns as indifferently as if we had come as conquerors." <sup>7</sup> Another noted "an apparent indifference as to who would be the victors." <sup>8</sup> It was not only the New Yorkers who felt ill will. A 26th Pennsylvanian said: "We are treated meanly here . . . the fancy New York and Philadelphia regiments are fed on fresh beef, have good tents, plenty of firewood." <sup>9</sup>

Jaded with entertaining soldiers, many people reciprocated with indifference to their saviors. A notable exception was a woman who "solicited the privilege of receiving into her family any of the men who might be taken seriously ill. The regiment ought not soon forget the name of Mrs. Bailey." <sup>10</sup>

More typical may have been the woman who observed "we understand the soldiers are covered with lice." <sup>11</sup> However, women of the area, including the Sisters of Charity, manned hospitals for the sick and wounded as well as the refreshment saloon.

It was not without cause that the residents lacked hospitality, for many New Yorkers became loutish during their stay. Even a *Times* correspondent reported that soldiers from New York occupied houses abandoned by farmers and jumped on beds wearing their boots.<sup>12</sup> Martin Brinton, a White Hall resident, remembered:

"The New York men had been taking fish, applebutter, meat, blankets, bed clothing, etc. They had also taken old Mrs. Oyster's linen." <sup>13</sup> His contemporary, Zacheus Bowman:

The New Yorkers were here, and we fed them as long as we had anything. **They turned out to be our worst enemies. They killed our hogs, chickens and so on. . . . We looked over at the hill on the opposite** side of the road from Heyd's [the Robert Whitehill House) and saw some hats that the soldiers took from old Mrs. Oyster. They were some kind of high hats she had. The New Yorkers had the high hats on and looked too funny marching with the hats on. The Doctor (John D. Bowman) said "They would make a nice mark to shoot at." <sup>14</sup>

Another contemporary of Brinton and Bowman, Benjamin Sawyer, a Union army veteran, told of New Yorkers bayoneting a hog and of attempting to steal a horse from Samuel Bowman. Samuel Shopp remembered the New Yorkers were "a rather rough-looking set of men," and "a bad set of fellows," who "took all of our preserves and everything else they could lay their hands on." <sup>78</sup>

John Mater said that a New York doctor took his horse and angered him enough to report the theft to General W. F. Smith, a Regular Army officer who took the field command for Couch June 26. Sympathizing, Smith called the New Yorkers "thieves" and queried: "Why the Hell didn't you shoot the Son of a Bitch down?" <sup>78</sup>

William Sadler added: "The New Yorkers stole everything they could

get their hands on . . . excepting two companies who paid for everything they took, throwing money down if we would not take it." <sup>17</sup> W. L. Gorgas remembered "houses were ransacked from top to bottom . . . not a single piece of furniture could be found; preserves and applebutter were used to decorate the walls, doors broken, chaff and feather beds cut open and their contents thrown around the floor. The contents of Denlinger's Store were strewn all along the picket line. . . . Packages of tea, coffee, muslin and calico could have been obtained from the pickets with but the asking for them." <sup>18</sup>

Making no effort to be objective, the New Yorkers tried to write off the Harrisburgers as "Copperheads." They termed the Dauphin County Senator a Copperhead <sup>19</sup> and attributed the disputes concerning terms of enlistment to Copperhead machinations. The *Herald* put it plainly: "The Copperhead sentiment is largely predominant." <sup>20</sup> Pennsylvania's sole contribution to the White House, James Buchanan, with Lee in Chambersburg, issued a public statement denouncing the method of carrying out the war which his successor had adopted, but supporting the goals. <sup>21</sup>

Irritated by a series of grievances, the New York newspaper correspondents who had been given less than their customary freedom to tell the world of Union defensive activities, interpreted desuetude as disloyalty. Such was incorrect. Their reports intensified latent ill-feeling because the New York militia in Pennsylvania received the *Times* and *Tribune* in preference to the Harrisburg newspapers. They read that the proprietary owners of the Camelback Bridge were charging troops for the privilege of crossing the river to defend the city and the bridge itself. <sup>22</sup> They learned in the *Times* that "prices were trebled with the advent of the soldiers. . . . The rebels should throw a sufficient number of shells into the city to make the inhabitants realize what was happening." <sup>23</sup> However, if the same New Yorker read a Harrisburg newspaper, he would find this criticism confirmed: "Certain local merchants would steal the trumpet from the Archangel Gabriel, if he turned his back." <sup>24</sup>

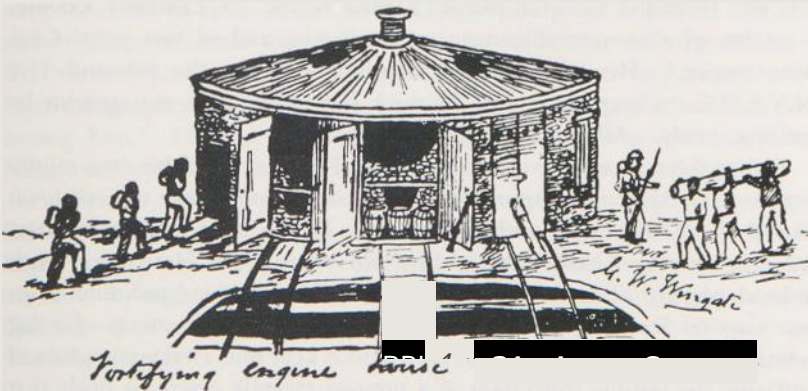
The newspapers reported correctly, if overenthusiastically. Rye coffee did go to fifteen cents per cup and a tallow candle for \$1. The toll collector on the Bridge did report enough military business so that the general government sent a check for \$3,028.63, and the usual dividend was doubled. <sup>25</sup> And as eminent a person as the State Historian of New York in the 8th Regimental History observed: "The meanest man in all creation is said to be the Adams County (Pa.) farmer. It is he who charged General Sickles \$5 for a sheet after his leg was amputated. . . ." <sup>26</sup>

The Harrisburg newspapers defended the city. The *Telegraph* explained that the idlers on the street were refugees who were only temporarily in the city <sup>27</sup> and that the men who were increasing prices were [ 26 )

"army peddlars " <sup>28</sup> It emphasized, too, that Harrisburg had contributed 2,500 men since 1861, including 500 in the 1863 emergency who had been ordered elsewhere. The *Patriot and Union* adopted the attitude that it would not dignify such slanders with refutation."

Perhaps if the militia had been training more vigorously they would have had less time to rail at the civilian population or to go marauding. After making camp they had much free time. Mornings were busy, with reveille at 5 a.m. and drills, but they had four full hours of free time after the noonday meal. Except for the unlucky chap designated cook in each six-man tent, the militiaman had ample opportunity to sit around the "A" tents, to perform personal chores, or to gripe. Soldiers clambered down the bluff carrying pails and canteens to get fresh water from the river. There they shared the supply with neighborhood cows which solemnly grazed on the green shoots that appear during low water on the tiny islets.<sup>30</sup> One of the aristocratic "City Grays" during the fortnight of dickering over enlistment terms went swimming with the cows and drowned. Drill resumed at 4, but there was additional free time before the 9:30 call for dousing all lights. After taps the regiment sang "Annie of the Vale" and "Poor Old Slave" late into the night. "Weeping Sad and Lonely" was one of the tunes which some thought was overworked.<sup>31</sup>

At least one outfit was fully satisfied with its lot, the Negro unit known for its assiduity in cleaning and polishing equipment. They worked "laughing and chatting as merrily as a child with a new toy—yet remembering the risk if they are captured, it took a high order of courage for them to enlist." <sup>32</sup>





## CHAPTER V

For Harrisburg and its West Shore the Great Invasion of 1863 reached its climax in three days—June 28, 29 and 30—the three immediately preceding three epochal days for the nation in Gettysburg.

A build-up of excitement began on the 22nd when Jenkins, this time backed by the infantry components of Ewell's Corps, started up the Valley again. Outside Greencastle he encountered Captain William H. Boyd, commanding the most proficient unit in Couch's command, the misleadingly designated First New York Cavalry, which on the 16th had come into the Department from Winchester as a guard for Milroy's retreating supply train. It was a regular unit of experienced men recruited principally in Philadelphia. In a fast brush Boyd took casualties, including a Pennsylvanian, Corporal William F. Rihl, the first man to die in the invasion and the namesake for a post of the G.A.R. Jenkins' men appeared "healthy and robust" and looked "as if they could endure any amount of fatigue,"<sup>1</sup> when his three regiments started their march north. They were in good spirits and eager for adventure. One jested with a companion with a thin moustache: "Take them mice out of your mouth. I see their tails sticking out." Commenting on another man's shoes, one "butternut" shot: "Come out of them boats—it's too soon to go into winter quarters."<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, they could be lighthearted on June 22. Between them and the Forts at Harrisburg lay only a skittery screening force, two regiments under a commander who had first met his troops only two days before. He was Brigadier General Joseph Farmer Knipe, of Lancaster County, a veteran of a six-year enlistment in the 'forties and of two years' Civil War service.<sup>3</sup> His mission from Couch was to use the 8th and 71st N.Y.S.N.G. to keep the enemy in check but to avoid an engagement by retiring slowly. All of this he accomplished.

Facing three seasoned veteran divisions, Knipe ordered his two militia regiments to take rail transportation back from Chambersburg to Carlisle on the 22nd. They obeyed with enthusiasm. By the 23rd the Confederates were re-entering Chambersburg, fifty-two miles from Harrisburg, with a band playing "Bonnie Blue Flag."<sup>4</sup> Following the band into town was General Ewell, still in his carriage, worried over the stump of a leg which refused to heal, nursing an ulcer which kept him awake at night and suffering the terrible frustration of a promise recently given his bride that he would end a lifetime of colorful swearing. With him came Mary Lincoln's brother, Major Todd of the Confederate Army. To Ewell went the District Attorney of Franklin County with an offer to cooperate.

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This sketch and those on pp. 24 and 27 were made by an eyewitness, the New York soldier, George Wingate, who later wrote a history of the 22nd Regiment.

"Lincoln should have shot you Copperheads long ago," exploded Dick Ewell, adding to the Postmaster, who had offered his hand: "Copperheads are sneaks and hypocrites unworthy the recognition of brave men." <sup>5</sup>

By the 24th the Knipe force was in Shippensburg regaining possession of certain items of equipment which it had left behind in its urgent move to obey the order to retire to the east. Chambersburg home guard members and civilians collected the material and forwarded it to Shippensburg.<sup>6</sup> By the 25th Jenkins was roaming the Carlisle area, twenty miles from Harrisburg, playfully capturing Sheriff Thomas Rippey's hat but releasing him.<sup>7</sup> On that day Knipe got the 8th and 71st back to New Kingston,<sup>8</sup> which one called "a long, gangling, undefined village." <sup>9</sup>

At 10 a.m. on the 27th of June, Jenkins rode up High Street past Carlisle Market and the jail and out of town down the Mud Road. Rodes' and Johnson's infantry division followed him into town later in the day. By nightfall about 12,000 armed men were spread in and around Carlisle, with advance elements as far as Hickorytown, half way to Mechanicsburg.<sup>10</sup>

### **Sunday, June 28, 1863**

When the Lord's Day began, "Old Devil" Jenkins was marshalling two

regiments of mounted men and two batteries of artillery, preparing to

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pounce on Mechanicsburg. They pounced without delay. Captain W. Harter Griffin was ordered to send forward a piece from his Maryland Battery. Wheeling a recently captured Federal Parrott gun into position, he fired a high-explosive round which exploded noisily over the square. Properly heralded, Jenkins tucked his magnificent beard into his belt and rode into town under a flag of truce. After shaking hands with a militia cavalry commander, he asked Mechanicsburg for 1,500 rations. Burgess George Hummel demurred, citing the difficulty of amassing so much on a Sunday morning.<sup>11</sup> Jenkins, having learned to bargain during his student days in Philo Club at Jefferson College<sup>12</sup> and in Congress, countered with the suggestion that his 800 men fan out over town and find food themselves. Within a few hours the citizens of Mechanicsburg were piling 1,500 rations at a collection point.

After pulling down the Stars and Stripes and leading half of his command to positions one mile east of town, Jenkins returned to the Ashland House near the Cumberland Valley Railroad Depot. Two miles east militia sentries high in a church steeple over Shiremanstown spotted the arrival of the Southern cavalry and rang the bells in alarm.<sup>13</sup> Silver Spring Presbyterian Church suspended divine services. At Fort Washington "the chaplain passed along the lines bidding men to rely on strength from above and commending us with words of Christian cheer to the Divine protection."<sup>14</sup>

Three-quarters of a mile to the south at "Camp Russell" the Brooklyn Regiments were gathering for church service. Before prayers could begin at noon, the colonel rushed in at full gallop: "Go back to your company street and strike tents at once." The historian added that the chaplain disappeared, not to be seen again.<sup>15</sup>

At this point the 26th Pennsylvania Emergency Regiment tramped past, reporting that it had mixed with Southern cavalry near Gettysburg, losing seventy-two men captured. It was retreating in good order via Lisburn and New Cumberland to the safety of the Bridgeport forts." Such reinforcement was needed, to say nothing of the support of Him whom the men petitioned in their interrupted prayers June 28. The raw militia huddled in the trenches perfectly aware of the hopelessness of their position if they were attacked by a determined assault force. And a determined force was coming.

About 1 p.m. General Jenkins thanked his host, Henry Irvine, for dinner and ordered the command away from Mechanicsburg in two sections. Sent north was the 14th Virginia Regiment under Colonel M. J. Ferguson. Accompanying it was the Griffin Battery, flying from its unit flagstaff the Pennsylvania bucktail which it had captured many battles before." When Ferguson reached the Carlisle and Harrisburg Turnpike he

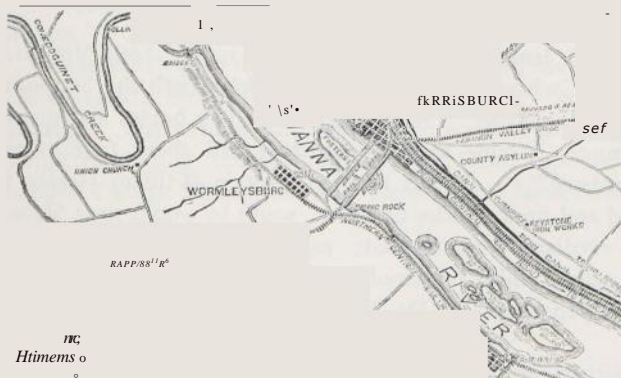
# NEW YORK HERALD.

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, JUNE 30, 1863.—TRIPLE SHEET.

PRICE THREE CENT

## THREATENED ATTACK ON HARRISBURG.

on of the Capital of Pennsylvania---The Approaches to the City from the West.



THE  
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## THE INVASION.

Advance of the Rebels Upon Harrisburg and Washington.

Skirmish Near Oyster Point and Mayville, in Front of the Approaches to Harrisburg.

Proclamation of the Rebels at Wrightsville.

The Destruction of the Bridge at Columbia.

Withdrawal of the Rebels from Wrightsville to York.

A Contribution of Money and 0,151,100 Levied on the Citizens of P.M.

The Arrival of the Rebels at Harrisburg.

Work Commenced on the Defense of Philadelphia.

In mid-1863 newspaper readers saw this account and others from the war front at Harrisburg. Correspondents swarmed over the area.

wheeled the command right and continued as far as the Salem Methodist Church on a rise of land about six miles west of Harrisburg. Here Knipe nipped a last time.

According to the report made by the defending unit, the artillery battery of Captain Elihu Spencer Miller: "Next morning [the 28th, after sleeping at Oyster Point] we again advanced, and our line was formed on Sporting Hill. Here Rebel guns opened on us from so great a distance that they produced no effect."<sup>18</sup> In this very brief encounter the Confederate artillery stood near the Church, and Miller near the brick farmhouse of the Eberly family which still hugs the road to Carlisle about one mile east of the Church.<sup>19</sup> That there was "no effect" can be explained by the circumstance that the pieces stood apart at extreme range. Further, both units were green. The Griffin unit had been recently filled out with recruits. The Miller Battery, composed of socially prominent Philadelphians, had not fired before this day. Unfamiliar with their equipment, the artillerymen could not harness their horses to the guns. Their one great quality was pluck, an ingredient that they had recently demonstrated with the 8th and 71st Regiments on the mission from Bridgeport to Chambersburg and back again.<sup>20</sup>

Following the brief encounter, the Miller Battery and four companies

of the 71st which accompanied it withdrew east within the picket lines near Oyster Point. The Griffin Battery followed, clattering down the Turnpike on the 28th as far as the Albright farmhouse at 36th Street, where it was forced off the road because of the presence of a blockade erected at this point.<sup>21</sup> By nightfall the Battery and its supporting units withdrew, probably to James Silver's Spring where there was sufficient water for the horses.

Meanwhile, General Jenkins re-attached himself to the 16th Virginia under Colonel James Cochran, which started east along both the Simpson Ferry and Trindle Spring Road. Commandeering a few horses and many sour cherries on route, it came to a "dominating hill about four miles distant from Harrisburg." <sup>22</sup> At this location Captain William Jackson's Battery unlimbered and fired a series of shots: south to woods near Shiremanstown where civilians were flushed; east to Oyster's Woods surrounding the old quarry which bordered Lime Kiln Lane ; southeast into the area surrounding the home of Dr. Joseph Crain, grandson of Robert Whitehill.

From the eyewitness accounts of several survivors the "dominating hill" of the Southern account was the rise on which sits old Peace Church on Trindle Road. W. L. Cromleigh, son of the sexton, recalled seeing on the Sabbath "800 men came from the West" and "planted four cannon at the church." He said that General Jenkins personally was among the contingent which reached the church building." After spending several hours there and firing sporadically until dusk, the Battery then withdrew west for night bivouac near the Neidig farm just east of Mechanicsburg.<sup>24</sup> Jenkins himself moved into the stone home which had just been hastily abandoned by John Rupp.

In Fort Washington the 23rd Regiment posted double sentries, but the 71st was ordered to send six companies out "in rifle pits beyond the Fort." <sup>22</sup> Presumably these men occupied either Fort Couch or the conjectural position to its west. Suffering a heavy cold caught on the 27th, engineer John Wilson crawled into a shelter to sleep at 9 p.m., but the 26th Pennsylvania, having lost its tenting in the rush back from Gettysburg, threw itself on the ground in the rain for the night. On the 28th the 32nd Pennsylvania slept sounder than usual. It had finally that day agreed to serve the nation, after being assured by the Secretary of War that it could go home when the emergency had passed." The Philadelphia Grays spent the daylight hours in the unaccustomed task of "chopping down a forest" <sup>27</sup> for Captain Wheeler, who wanted fields of fire cleared for the big guns he was dragging into the fort over Bridgeport.

The artillery park had grown to approximately twenty-five pieces.<sup>28</sup> From the Navy Yard in Philadelphia had come a naval captain, 108

sailors and nine great howitzers." The City of Philadelphia had contributed Home Guard guns. Washington had forwarded on fifteen railroad cars other pieces of questionable worth and ammunition which seemed to fit none of the weapons.<sup>30</sup>

A regimental surgeon, Dr. Malone, had opened a hospital in the tavern in Bridgeport,<sup>31</sup> and preparations were secretly made to burn or fell the bridges." The defenders were as ready as they ever would be.

While sentries peered out into the darkness, General Lee issued from Chambersburg the penultimate order to Ewell: "Move directly on Harrisburg." But toward Chambersburg raced a messenger from General Longstreet telling Lee that Hooker had been replaced by a new commander, George Meade, and that the Army of the Potomac at last was on its way north.<sup>33</sup>



## CHAPTER VI

**Monday, June 29, 1863**

Jenkins' plan for the 29th called for a threat with his left while he threw a probing right to the south to reconnoiter the Harrisburg defenses. The threat was a noisy distraction at Oyster Point, while the probe was a ride into the high ground back of New Cumberland. In both maneuvers was Jenkins successful.

Lieutenant Herman Schuricht, who commanded a company in the 14th Virginia Regiment, gave this account:

In the morning I received orders to meet General Jenkins and to act as his escort. We reconnoitered to the right of the Harrisburg Turnpike, charged on the enemy's outposts, and viewed the city of Harrisburg and its defenses. This was the farthest advance made by any Confederate troops during the campaign)

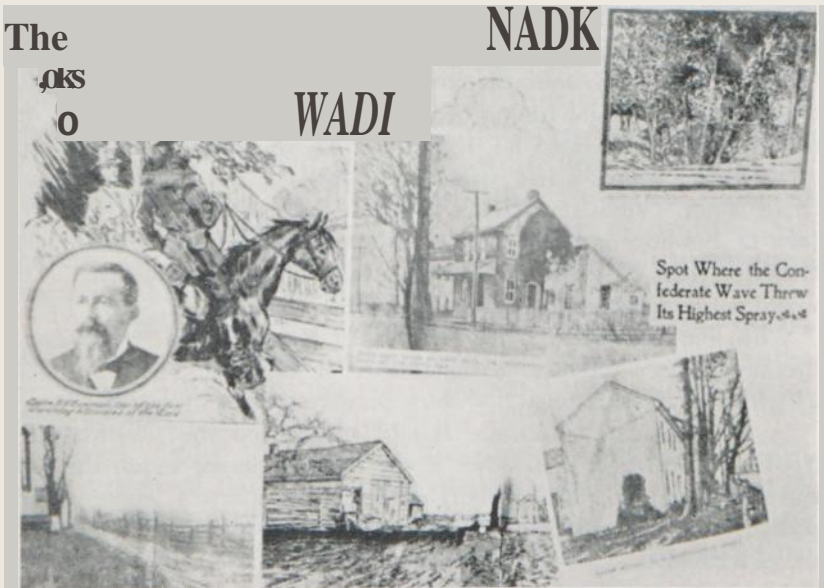
From the defenders' side there is no military account which mentions the probe. Two civilian accounts may allude to it. William Sadler recalled that "the Rebels had a line at Slate Hill," a possible reference to the force which passed in that direction.= W. L. Gorgas more certainly saw the force "to the number of about sixty" appearing on the Lisburn Road on June 29.<sup>3</sup> There is no other mention of a charge by Schuricht on the outpost, so that the Lieutenant must have been referring to the diversionary action at Oyster Point.

That skirmish can be more accurately traced. Several civilians survived to give eyewitness accounts, and both newspaper correspondents and military commanders wrote certain details. The situation in the beginning of the day apparently was that a defending picket line ran across Lowther Manor from approximately the high ground where modern 21st Street most closely approaches the Conodoguinet Creek, down 21st Street to White Hill and along the Lisburn Road toward the Yellow Breches Creek. General William Hall, one of the few general officers from New York who risked the uncertainties of actual campaigning, starting June 23, had posted pickets.\* These presumably were the men who looted Polly Oyster's linen closet and Denlinger's.

Jenkins set up a fierce clamor with the artillery. The *Herald* reported thirty shells fired,' certainly an underestimate because one survivor alone found fifteen unexploded shells.<sup>o</sup> The 71st Regiment said that firing on the 29th lasted for two hours.' Griffin and Jackson both participated, advancing their weapons down both the Turnpike and the Trindle Spring

Road, shooting in many directions. One battery got into position at Albright's and lobbed shells through Tommy Oyster's woodshed at modern 32nd and Market Streets. Other shots were laid into the several road barricades and at least one as far as the Church of God on 21st Street.<sup>8</sup>

Commanding the picket line was Lieutenant Colonel John Elwell, of the 22nd New York, whose force was a 150-man volunteer group from three regiments. In his report of the action he told of proceeding "to Oyster Point station" where he stationed fifty men from the 8th Regiment "due north and across the fields and beyond to the railroad." Since there never was a railroad to the north, he meant south, to the line of the C.V.R.R. He then "established in a like manner a portion of the 23rd Regiment from the Carlisle Road due south [meaning north] keeping the remaining company [from the 56th Regiment] as reserve." On route to the position he heard cannonading at five-or ten-minute intervals. When firing began on his front Elwell personally "advanced over a cornfield to a small wood situated on more elevated ground . . . the skirmishers advanced about the distance of a mile. . . ." Here, the somewhat confusing reference must be to Confederate skirmishers, for the defenders actually re-



The Philadelphia *North American* in 1907 ran this feature article claiming a highwater mark for Camp Hill. In the center is the Toll House. At the bottom left is the fence then running along 28th Street. H. N. Bowman is the bearded face in the circle, and Gen. Jenkins the subject of the sketch in the upper background.

treated in the face of the advance of the 34th Virginia Battalion commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Vincent A. Witcher."

When the Confederate advance began, the defenders had an artillery piece located approximately in front of the Toll House, to judge from the place that they accidentally struck the Oyster Point Tavern on its eastern end. As Witcher advanced and as the Confederate artillery rolled with it, the defenders withdrew, probably to the ridge on which runs 21st Street. When later in the day Witcher pulled back, the New Yorkers returned to the positions that they had held at the beginning of the day's action.

Zacheus Bowman, who lived just east of the Point, remembered Confederates "between one and two hours" at the Toll House itself with the New Yorkers fallen back "200 yards beyond the Bowman homestead" at 26th and Market Streets. He hid in that stone house during the action, watching the skirmish and hearing the bullets splattering against the structure.

No civilian recalled any advance by the Confederates beyond Lime Kiln Lane, modern 28th Street, an appropriate intermediate target for a tactic such as that of June 29. Here ran a fence from which an attacker would wish to flush riflemen. After several hours reinforcements arrived for Elwell from the 11th Regiment, and almost simultaneously Witcher must have received information that he could withdraw. By mid-afternoon General Ewell had received the reconnaissance report in Carlisle, so that, the probe on the right having been successfully completed, Witcher on the left could have ceased his distraction. Elwell undoubtedly advanced to where he formerly had stationed his pickets, north and south of Oyster Point. Verification of his advance comes from the fact that Dr. John D. Bowman on the evening of the 29th was summoned to the old Hendricks barn at 24th and Market Streets to treat a casualty.<sup>12</sup> He would not have been called beyond the lines.

When the day ended, General Rodes, of Ewell's Corps, was saying: "Jenkins made a thorough reconnaissance of Harrisburg defenses with a view to our advance upon it—which we were to do on the 30th." <sup>13</sup>

In the defenders' camp the *Herald* summarized the situation succinctly: "As the sun goes down in the West, it leaves within the fort and within and around Harrisburg an anxious, wondering, guessing and partially fearful population. The enemy holds a position describing the arc of a circle. . . . We expect a fight tomorrow, more or less general or serious in its character." <sup>14</sup>

## CHAPTER VII

Tuesday, June 30, 1863

The tide had rushed to its highest on the afternoon of the 29th. By daylight on the day following the waters had rolled back leaving the mouth of the Valley dry. Very late on the 28th General Lee countermanded his order to Ewell and directed the Corps toward a small Adams County town. Ewell by noon on the 29th had started Johnson's Division for Shippensburg, and by 3 a.m. on the 30th, the last of his force, except Jenkins' Brigade, had proceeded south out of Carlisle for Mount Holly.'

Only one unit remained, Jenkins' Brigade, sprawled over the several square miles between Trindle Spring Road and the old Turnpike. Colonel W. S. Nye, applying a West Pointer's experience to the tactical situation, believes that Ewell left Jenkins because he forgot about him.<sup>2</sup> Three substantiating arguments might be made: (1) The Brigade was not intended as a decoy, because it was completely hidden—a hidden decoy is no decoy ; (2) the cavalry would really have been much more useful in the advance of the Corps than in the position of rear guard; (3) Jenkins, as part of Stuart's Corps serving on detached duty with Ewell, might more easily be forgotten than an integral part of the Corps.

Here lay Jenkins at least until 3 a. m. on the 30th, when one unit at least got word from Jenkins to retire into Mechanicsburg and hold the town with the support of one of Jackson's artillery pieces, while the rest of the Brigade withdrew.<sup>2</sup> At 2 p. m. Cochran's Regiment, having "liberated" liquor on route west, roared into Carlisle via the York Road. At 11 p. m. Jenkins joined them.<sup>4</sup> During the darkness the 23rd New York captured a man bearing dispatches for Jenkins, conceivably an order from Ewell, but the account does not state.

After the sun rose, the 26th Pennsylvania was ordered out of the Fort and forward to 21st Street, where it veered north and went into bivouac on "rising ground." To this camp on a hill is attributed by some the origin of the name substituted for "White Hall" four years later.

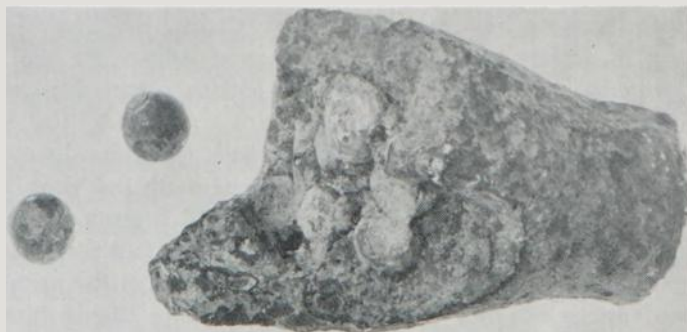
General "Baldy" Smith, Division Commander, as the morning lengthened determined that a reconnaissance in force should investigate the strange quiet at the front. Previously he had interviewed Ben Huber, who had 'wiggled out of Chambersburg via Perry County, and gained the information that Lee was heading south.<sup>o</sup>

Selected for the investigation was a senior militia officer from New York, Brigadier General John Ewen, whose command was the brigade which guarded the Camp Russell site. At 10 a. m. on the 30th, the 22nd and 37th New York were told to prepare for a four-hour march. They

left behind their tenting equipment and all rations except for three crackers per man. The first lap was north to the Regimental Headquarters under the C.V.R.R. Bridge where they turned left and headed west. Arriving approximately at the Oyster Point area, they were joined by "Baldy" Smith, who rode out with his staff, Thomas Scott, John Wilson and others.

Ewen and his superior officer inspected the area, interviewed certain farmers and received the information that the Confederates had ridden west. Smith then ordered the Brigade back toward its headquarters and a belated meal. When they had come almost within range of the rations, approximately at Eichelberger's Hill, or modern 17th Street, they were overtaken by Lieutenant Stanwood. At full gallop he shouted the news that he had found the Rebels at Sporting Hill. Still unfed, the 22nd and 37th then countermarched three miles to Sporting Hill, scene of the first encounter two days before.<sup>8</sup>

The tale of what the *Official Records* term "Skirmish at Sporting Hill" lies beyond the scope of this account, beyond Lowther Manor. But here at last the New York militia and Captain Henry Landis' Philadelphia Battery found the rear guard and inflicted grievous wounds.<sup>8</sup> When night fell, the opposing sides withdrew. Harrisburg was safe, but the storm was about to break in Adams County. Polly Oyster began her search for lost linen, Denlinger re-opened his store. In Fort Washington the General sighed relief but issued his order: "This command will take up the line of march for Gettysburg at once."<sup>10</sup>



2,

Excavated within 200 yards of 21st Street by H. Frank Hare, this is a U. S. Schenkl shell, one of the most widely-used projectiles in 1861-65. This is the after body of the shell. The lead balls are embedded in a tar-like substance.

## POST SCRIPT

Inevitably this piece will shake loose additional items of source material, some of which may materially alter the story written here. Already an important new piece has come to light—after the preceding pages were set in type. Without further comment here is "Some Personal Experience of Robert A. Welsh, 33rd Pa. Volunteers in the Gettysburg Campaign," a manuscript in the possession of the Robert Taylor family, Lemoyne, whose grandfather penned his recollections in 1912.

The first night we were in the fort building (sic), known as Fort Washington, we heard great crashes and at times cries of men . . . The night before we were wondering of what use the Fort could be, for all in front, down the slopes as far as the eye could penetrate, were dense primeval forests. Now these were down. Scores of acres were filled with fallen trees . . . with limbs mixed together and lying in all directions, formed a mass practically impenetrable. No foe could charge through, especially in the face of artillery and musketry fire . . .

About the 27th of June my regiment was sent down the pike about four miles and put upon picket. Directly in front was the rebel line of pickets and skirmishers. They soon let us know they were about, as occasional shots came from them, to which reply was always made. The first excitement gave way to a feeling of annoyance. This sniping was useless and vexatious. This was the nearest approach of the "Johnnies" to Harrisburg. Right where we were stationed was an old stone farm house, which for several days the rebel pickets had occupied. The family had fled in terror . . . ragged gentlemen from the southland had taken full advantage of the situation . . . conveyed the beds to the lawn; also chairs, lounges, etc. Evidently there was a piano player among them, for an old piano had also been lugged out of doors. Whether being an Union piano and therefore refusing to satisfactorily render "Dixie" and "Maryland, My Maryland" or that the player being rusty became angered at want of skill will never be known. But something happened for the works of the instrument were scattered upon the ground and the case badly shattered. An attempt had been made to burn one leg, not very successfully.

In advancing, a line of our scouts swung through an orchard in the rear of the house, which being a flanking movement on the gentlemen from Dixie in the house, they hastily vacated very quietly too until they gained the road and manned a small hill cut by the road. It looked dangerous—we didn't know what was behind that hill . . . strung a skirmish line along the edge of the orchard and behind a stone fence across the road. Both sides fired an occasional shot to let the opponents know all was well. As our Johnnie friends had burned all the fences in sight we resorted to what they had left of the old piano. It burned slowly but surely and a *gang* of the boys were boiling coffee in their tin cups soon after dark, when bang, bang, bang came several shots at the conspicuous spot. A ball smashed through the tin cup of Corporal Jim Lott and he had no coffee. Billy Helm was stooping at the fire lighting a splint for his pipe when a mink ball hit a piece of the burning wood and knocked a lot of ashes into his *face*, filling his eyes . . . After this the fire was voted a bad place to sit by.

We remained here until the 30th, when as after daybreak no reveille or rifle shots came from down the road, a couple of our scouts crept down and found no one. Presently a countryman came up and said "I guess them graybacks are going back home. There seems to be a lot of them marching off down the road . . ."

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"True Citizens" —  
Digging Fort

Washington

Sketch in *Leslie's Illustrated  
History of the Civil War*



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