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**CHAPTER XVI.
THE FIRST BRIGADE---CONTINUED.**

General U. S. Grant, Commander-in-Chief – Consolidation of the Corps – Getty takes command of the Division – Changes in the Brigade – Review of the Situation – Campaign of the Wilderness – The Service of Getty's Division – The part of the Vermont Brigade – Terrific Fighting – A thousand Vermonters Killed and Wounded the First Day; Two hundred the Second Day – Heavy Losses of Officers – March to Spottsylvania – The Vermonters saluted by the Sixth Corps – Death of General Sedgwick – General Wright succeeds Him – The Fighting in the Lines of Spottsylvania – Upton's Charge on the Salient – The Struggle at the Bloody Angle – Losses of the Vermont Regiments – The Eleventh Regiment joins the Brigade – Picket Duty Between the Lines – Movement to the North Anna – March to Cold Harbor

General Halleck's meddlesome rule as commander-in-chief at last came to an end, and on the 10th of March the army was stirred by the arrival at Brandy Station of the new commander-in-chief of the armies of the United States, Lieut. General Ulysses S. Grant. The troops soon learned that he was to take the field in person with the Army of the Potomac, and they were not slow to conclude that the change "meant business."

On the 23d of March the Army of the Potomac was reorganized, by consolidating the five army corps into three – a measure previously recommended by General Meade. The new corps were the Second, General Hancock; Fifth, General Warren, and Sixth, General Sedgwick. The Sixth was the old Sixth corps with the addition of Rickett's division of the Third corps. The division commanders of the corps were General H. G. Wright, General George W. Getty and General J. B. Ricketts.

General Getty, who succeeded General Howe as the commander of the second division,¹ was one of the best officers in the army. A native of the District of Columbia, a graduate of West Point in 1840, brevetted captain of artillery for gallant conduct at Contreras and Cherubusco in the Mexican war, appointed brigadier general of volunteers in 1862, promoted Lieut. Colonel in the regular army for gallant and meritorious service during the siege of Suffolk, Va., in April, 1863, where he commanded a division of the Ninth corps; the husband of a Southern lady, but a true patriot; a thorough soldier, modest, faithful to duty, sharing danger with his men; as cool as he was brave in action, equal to any position in which he was placed, he soon won the absolute respect and confidence of all under him, and his men came to believe, with reason, that they had about the best division commander in the army. The brigades of Getty's division, were the First, General Frank Wheaton; Second, General L. A. Grant; Third, General T. O. Neill, and Fourth, General H. L. Eustis.² These were all uncommonly good brigades, and the division, as the event proved, had no superior, as a fighting division, in the Army of the Potomac.

March was a remarkably stormy month. Rain, hail, and snow storms followed each other in close succession, and swollen streams and bottomless mud forbade active operations by either of the armies along the Rapidan. On the 22d of March, six inches of snow lay on the ground at Brandy Station; and the Second and Sixth Vermont regiments had a pitched battle of snow balls. Up to the 7th of April the

¹ General Howe was relieved from the command of the division, March 2d, 1864, to become chief of artillery for the defences of Washington.

² Wheaton's brigade consisted of the Sixty-second New York, and the Ninety-third, Ninety-eighth, One Hundred and Second and One Hundred and Thirty-ninth Pennsylvania regiments; Neill's of the Seventh Maine, Forty-third, Forty-ninth, and Seventy-seventh New York and Sixty-first Pennsylvania; and Eustis's of the Seventh, Tenth and Thirty-seventh Massachusetts and Second Rhode Island.

crests of the Blue Ridge were white with snow. Target practice and drills filled all the clear days, and court martials for the trial of offenders were steadily in progress when storms and mud prevented other occupation of the officers. As April advanced, however, the weather improved; the roads grew hard; and successive orders sending home the women in camp, ordering the sutlers to leave, and cutting down camp equipage, showed that serious business was ahead.

In the Vermont brigade since the year opened, Colonel Walbridge of the Second and Colonel Stoughton of the Fourth regiments had resigned, in consequence of disability and wounds, and the regiments of the brigade, on the 1st of May, were commanded, the Second by Colonel Newton Stone, the Third by Colonel T. O. Seaver, Fourth by Colonel George P. Foster, Fifth by Lieut. Colonel John R. Lewis, and Sixth by Colonel E. L. Barney. The brigade commander, General L. A. Grant, had just been commissioned as brigadier general of volunteers. The morning reports of May 1st, showed 3,308 officers and men present for duty. Of this number there were actually in the ranks about 2,850, divided as follows: Second regiment, 700; Third, 570; Fourth, 680; Fifth, 510; Sixth, 450. The men were in fine condition, strong in heart and in body.

The national exigency at this time was indeed great. The purpose of the North had not been weakened by three years of war; but a greatly depreciated currency, the necessity of resorting to drafts to fill the army, and other ominous signs, impressed on all in civil or military authority the tremendous need of Union victories in the field. On the other side the Southern conscription was filling the Confederate armies more rapidly than the Northern drafts were the armies of the Union. The rebel cruisers had driven American commerce from the seas; while the blockade runners kept the Confederacy supplied with munitions. The Southern historian,

Pollard, asserts that "it was at no great physical disadvantage that the South, with all her strength brought to the surface by conscription and impressments, with all her resources employed in the war, re-entered the contest in the year 1864." "The resources of the South," he adds, "both in men and substance, to prosecute the war, were ample." Doubtless these resources had hitherto been used with greater unity and efficiency than those of the North. It was felt on both sides that the crisis of the war was at hand. The South advanced to meet it with more hope, and the North with more anxiety, than had prevailed in either section since McClellan retreated from Richmond in 1862.

The two armies were never in such a condition of efficiency for their bloody work. The Army of the Potomac numbered, in round numbers, 100,000 men of all arms; that of Northern Virginia, 75,000.³ The preponderance of numbers on the Federal side was largely counterbalanced by the advantages of position, of better knowledge of the ground, and of fighting on the defensive, on the other side.

Lee's army, like the Army of the Potomac, consisted on the 1st of May of three infantry corps, under Longstreet, Ewell and A. P. Hill. No official report of its actual strength on the 1st of May is known to exist. General Humphreys shows that its strength could not have been *less* than 62,000 men with 224 guns. General W. H. Taylor, of Lee's staff, A. A. G. of the Army of Northern Virginia, gives it a total of 64,000. General Badeau's detailed estimate, gives it an aggregate of 75,391 present for duty.

It was perfectly understood, on each side, that the Army

³ The morning report of the Army of the Potomac for April 30th, showed present for duty, 99,438 men. The three infantry corps aggregated 73,394; Sheridan's cavalry corps, 12,424; the artillery, engineers, etc., made up the rest. The Ninth corps, General Burnside, 17,000 strong, joined the army in the Wilderness. It is to be remembered that that number of men actually in the ranks, is always considerably smaller than the number reported present for duty."

of the Potomac would take the initiative. On the 2d of May Grant's order for the movement of the army was issued, and on that day Lee met his corps and division commanders, at the signal station on Clark's Mountain, ten miles south of Grant's headquarters, and told them that the Army of the Potomac was about to move, and in his opinion would cross the Rapidan by the fords below leading into the Wilderness.

Grant's problem in the movement now on foot, was to bridge and cross an unfordable river; to turn the right of his opponent, and to take through a rugged region, covered with dwarf pines and scrub oak, and an undergrowth of bristling shrubs and tangling vines, threaded by narrow roads with which his antagonist was much better acquainted than himself, an army covering eighty miles of highway with its 100,000 men and 20,000 horses and 320 guns and 4,000 army wagons. One day he knew would be his, while his movement was unfolding itself. More than that he could not be sure of, for he had an opponent who would be likely to allow him no advantage that could be prevented by prompt action.

Lee's problem was a much more simple one. His plan naturally would be, and was, to strike the Army of the Potomac on the march, cut it in two, hold its halves divided and entangled in the Wilderness, and to drive what he did not destroy and capture back across the Rapidan, as he had driven Hooker a year before. The highways of the region dictated the course of the movements. Grant must move through the Wilderness by roads whose general direction was from north to south. Lee must strike him by roads crossing these from west to east.

The movement of the Army of the Potomac began at midnight of Tuesday, the 3d of May. That day the cavalry moved to Germanna and Ely's Fords, put guards in all the occupied houses on the way, to prevent the inhabitants from carrying information to the enemy, and guarded the fords, while the engineers laid five bridges across the stream.

The infantry moved for the most part in two parallel columns. The Second corps crossed at Ely's Ford, moved to Chancellorsville, and halted at noon of the 4th on Hooker's old battle-ground. The Fifth corps started at the same time, crossed at Germanna Ford, and moved to the Wilderness tavern, six miles from the river, where it halted in the afternoon. The Sixth corps started at four o'clock for Germanna Ford, following the Fifth corps. The men carried fifty rounds of cartridges, and six days' rations, three in their haversacks and three in their knapsacks. Before they reached the river, Lieut. General Grant, with his staff, rode along the column, on his way to the ford, and was greeted with cheers by the men. They could not forget that two attempts to force a passage to Richmond by the overland route, had failed; but they were willing to try again, under Grant.

The Sixth corps crossed the river in the middle of the afternoon, and halted and bivouacked, as ordered, about three miles beyond the ford. Nightfall found the mass of the troops across the Rapidan – though the trains were crossing all night.

The first step of the campaign, and a very important and critical one, had thus been accomplished. While it was in progress, General Lee, who learned of the movement during the morning, was promptly moving his army toward the Army of the Potomac. Two of his columns moved by nearly parallel roads – the old Orange and Fredericksburg turnpike, constructed many years before, and the Orange plank road, built by another corporation in the days of the plank road mania, between the same places. These roads crossed Grant's line of march at right angles, about three miles apart, in the middle of the Wilderness. Ewell's corps moved by the turnpike, and Hill's by the plank road. Longstreet's corps, which had been lying at Gordonsville, seven miles south of Lee's headquarters at Orange Court House, had farther to march, and would reach the field by a lower road, coming in from

the southwest. Advanced troops of the two armies bivouacked that night about five miles apart.

In the next two days, Wednesday and Thursday, the 5th and 6th of May – sad anniversaries in many a Vermont household – the terrible battle of the Wilderness was fought.

Of all the battles of the war, perhaps none is more difficult to describe in detail. The scrubby and tangled forest which shrouded, and still shrouds the field, seemed at the time to envelop the battle in mystery. Few of the officers and men engaged retained very definite conceptions of either time or space. They moved when the lines surged forward or back. They made the best fight they could against the seen and unseen foes in front and on right and left. But when or where or why they moved, or what was the result of their fighting, few understood. The battle was characterized by unseen movements of troops; terrific volleys of musketry, bursting at close range from the thickets; charges through woods so dense that field officers could hardly see the line of a company; sudden appearances and disappearances of bodies of troops, through jungles veiled in smoke; opposing brigades and regiments hugging the ground, not daring to rise for advance or retreat, yet keeping up incessant fusillades; lines rapidly thinning and ever closing up, while many dead dropped unseen in the underbrush, and many wounded men crept off alone into the hollows. The ground forbade almost all use of artillery; and preponderance of numbers had not moral effect, and was indeed of little actual avail.⁴ Through the mist and smoke of this battle, however, some brilliant lights appear. And among the brightest of these is the shining service of Getty's division, and of the Vermont brigade of that division. Had they failed, or fled, it is hard to see how the result could have been less than terrible disaster to the army. Let us see if this service can be made clear.

⁴ "So far as I know, no great battle ever took place before on such ground." – General A. A. Humphreys.

In the early morning of the 5th, the Union columns were again moving to the south. The Fifth corps, Warren's, followed by the Sixth, Sedgwick's, formed the heavier column, and marched on the right, and so nearest the enemy, by the main road leading southeast from Germanna Ford, through the Wilderness. On the left the Second corps, Hancock's, marched from Chancellorsville, by a road intersecting the road from Germanna Ford at Todd's Tavern on the farther edge of the Wilderness. Having the shorter route of the two, Hancock reached Todd's Tavern without opposition. Here he was halted between eight and nine o'clock in the morning by an order from General Meade, through whom Grant's orders were issued, they having become satisfied that Lee was preparing to fight in the Wilderness.⁵ Shortly before this time Warren had passed the intersection of the Orange turnpike with his line of march, had sent a division a short distance up the pike to guard his flank, and had discovered that the enemy's infantry were in force on the pike, two miles from the Wilderness Tavern. This infantry was the head of Ewell's corps, which had advanced to that point and was waiting there till Hill should be well advanced on the Orange plank road, when both were to attack along the lines of those roads. Hill was nearly as far along on the plank road, and the skirmishers of his advance were even then engaged with a cavalry force under Colonel John Hammond, beyond Parker's store, three miles from the Wilderness Tavern. The discovery of Confederate columns on these two roads revealed the main features of Lee's movement and plan of attack; and the two points at which these roads struck the line of march

⁵ Early in the morning of the 5th, Generals Meade and Grant, with their staffs, after riding five miles from Germanna Ford, halted near an old mill in the Wilderness. Aides came with despatches. "They say that Lee intends to fight us here," said General Meade, as he read them. "Very well," was the quiet reply of Grant. — C. C. Coffin.

of Grant's main column, became at once points of the utmost strategic consequence. That line of march was over the Germanna Plank Road, as far as the Wilderness Tavern and a mile beyond it. From there on, for four miles, it was over the Brock Road.⁶ This is a curved road, beginning on the Orange Turnpike, crossing the Germanna Road, a mile and half southeast of the Wilderness Tavern; next crossing the Orange Plank Road at right angles; and running thence southeast to Todd's Tavern, on the road to Spottsylvania. The two most important points to be held, therefore, for the Union army, were these junctions, of the turnpike with the Germanna Road, and of the Orange Plank Road with the Brock Road. Of the two the latter was the more important, because upon it Lee was likely to throw, and did throw, his heaviest columns, and because the possession of it by Lee, would be to place two-thirds of the army of Northern Virginia between the two wings of the Army of the Potomac; to cut off the Second corps; to hold the Fifth and Sixth corps entangled in the Wilderness; and perhaps to wreck Grant's campaign at its very outset. The importance of this point is of course generally recognized by historians of this battle. Swinton says of it: "Four miles east of Parker's store the plank road is "intersected by the Brock Road, which runs southward to Spottsylvania Court House, and on which Hancock was moving up to join the main body of the army. It is obvious, therefore, that this junction of roads was a strategic point of the first importance, and if Hill should be able to seize it, he would interpose effectually between the two Union "columns." General Badeau, whose relations to Lieut. General Grant were such that his description of the campaign may be considered to be almost equivalent to a description by General Grant, says: "The Brock road is the key of all

⁶ Or Brock's Road.

this region. * * * Cutting these "transverse roads at right angles, it enabled whichever army held it to outflank the other, "and was of course of immense importance to both commanders." General Humphreys, in his elaborate description of this battle, does not in terms designate any one point as of more importance than another; but his narrative fully shows the supreme importance of this point.

The selection of the force which was to hold this point could not have been a matter of chance, which so often, in great battles, determines the presence of one rather than another body of troops, at critical points. As soon as Lee's purpose became evident, General Meade, by Lieut. General Grant's direction, ordered that General Getty, with his division of the Sixth corps, or the larger part of it, be sent to the junction of the Brock and Plank roads, with instructions to "hold that point at all hazards, until relieved." At the same time he sent an order to General Hancock at Todd's Tavern, to move his corps up the Brock road, and to connect with the force holding the junction of that road with the plank road, and be prepared to support an attack out on the latter road.

As the Sixth corps was behind the Fifth corps in the order of march, and the latter was thus the nearest to the junction of the Orange plank and Brock roads, the natural movement would have been to send a division of the Fifth corps to that point, and to supply its place on the turnpike by bringing forward a portion of the Sixth corps. But that was not what was done. And while no implication is here intended that there were not in the Fifth corps troops worthy to be entrusted with almost any duty, it cannot be doubted that the detaching of Getty and his division for this special service was due to the fact that it would not do to make any mistake in the selection of the officer and troops sent to this key-point. Grant and Mead knew that it would be hours before Hancock could get his corps into position to

protect that point; and that Warren was likely to have heavy fighting to do on the turnpike and would need all his men. They selected a division that could be relied on to reach the plank road promptly, and to hold it till the gaps between the wings of the army could be closed. So Getty's division was detached for the purpose; and there is some reason to suppose that the selection made was to some extent due to the fact that the Vermont brigade was part of that division.⁷ Getty took with him his first, second, and fourth brigades, leaving the third with the Sixth corps. How he and they discharged the trust reposed on them will be seen.

The battle opened in earnest about noon, on Warren's front. He drove Ewell's advance back for a mile, but was in turn driven back, and, though supported by a portion of the Sixth corps, had all and sometimes more than he could do to hold his own – the dense second-growth of timber greatly impeding his movements, and preventing effective massing of his men. He lost during the day some ground, two guns and over three thousand men, killed, wounded and captured; but at nightfall still held his main position across the turnpike and in front of the Wilderness Tavern.

Getty reached the junction of the Brock and Orange plank roads shortly before noon, and none too soon; for the advance of Heth's division (of Hill's corps) was pushing for the same point, and driving in Colonel Hammond, who with the Fifth New York cavalry, was falling back before the enemy's infantry, not over half a mile away from the Brock road. Getty at once sent forward a line of skirmishers, who relieved the cavalry, and drove back the enemy's skirmishers for some distance. The Vermont brigade was then advanced, passing the First brigade, (Wheaton's, which had led the

⁷ Surgeon S. J. Allen, of the Fourth Vermont, who was medical director on General Getty's staff, and with him when he received this order, says that it was accomplished by a special direction that he should take the Vermont brigade, with two other brigades of his division.

column to this point,) and was posted in front of the crossroads, on the left of the Orange plank road, in two lines. The Fourth and Third regiments were in front with two companies of the Fifth thrown out as skirmishers, under Captain Ormsbee, and the Second, Sixth and Fifth were the second line.⁸ Wheaton's brigade was formed in like manner on the right of the plank road, with a section of artillery in the road, between the two brigades;⁹ and the line was extended into the woods to the right, by Eustis's brigade. The Vermont regiments, by order of their commander, piled a partial cover of rails and logs, which proved of good service later in the day. General Getty held this position for some three hours, against a pressure of the enemy which hour by hour grew more threatening. About three o'clock the first indications that he was to be supported appeared in the sound and sight of the head of Hancock's column, coming up the Brock road. General Grant, whose headquarters were on a knoll by the Wilderness Tavern, had become impatient to strike Hill before he should become more strongly concentrated on the plank road, and had sent an order to Hancock to unite with Getty, and drive the enemy back to or beyond Parker's store. This order General Hancock found it impossible to obey promptly. His artillery, filling the Brock road, which was narrow and densely wooded on each side, greatly retarded the advance of his infantry; and the formation of the troops as they came up, was impeded by the woods and underbrush. He rode forward in person, to confer with Getty, learned from him that he (Getty) had two Confederate divisions in his front, and was expecting momentarily an attack in force, assured him of support at the earliest possible moment, and directed General Birney, commanding the advance of the Second corps, to form his division, as fast as it arrived, on Getty's left. Before Birney,

⁸ The regiments were placed in the order named from right to left.

⁹ Part of Rickett's battery, F., First Pennsylvania Light Artillery.

however, got into position, Getty received an order from General Meade to attack without waiting longer for Hancock; and he at once moved forward to the assault. The force in front of him was Heth's division, with Wilcox's division on Heth's left. Generals Lee and A. P. Hill were both with Heth's division, and Lee, it is fair to presume, gave his personal attention to the movements of Hill's corps. The latter's front line ran along a ridge, so screened by the trees and undergrowth that neither the nature of the ground nor the position of his line could be determined twenty yards away. The first of Getty's troops to become engaged were the Vermonters. They had moved forward scarce three hundred yards, when they were received by a tremendous volley, bursting from the thickets but a few yards in front. They halted, returned the fire, and then dropped down, to get cover from the hail-storm of bullets. The enemy did the same. Again the lines were ordered to advance; but when the men rose, so many were at once shot down that it became plain that to advance was simply destruction. The men dropped again. They could not advance, but there was no thought of retreat. The second line closed up on the first, the Second regiment creeping forward through the bushes to a position nearly on a line with the Fourth, and both regiments kept up a destructive fire, under which the enemy was as powerless to advance as they. The Third regiment, bearing to the left, pushed forward beyond its line of skirmishers, and became engaged in much the same manner. The Sixth regiment moved up to the support of the Third and the Fifth took position still farther to the left. The other brigades of the division became also sharply engaged; but their lines were not as close to the enemy as those of the Vermont brigade, and the fighting along them was far less bloody. In the Vermont regiments the carnage was fearful. The loss of field and line officers who were on their feet and moving along the lines, while the men hugged the ground,

was especially severe. Colonel Stone, the gallant young colonel of the Second, fell with a ball through his thigh; retired to have his wound dressed, and returned to his post, soon to drop dead, shot through the head. Lieut. Colonel Tyler took his place, till, an hour later, he too fell, with a mortal wound, leaving the regiment without any field officer. Colonel Foster of the Fourth received a ball in the thigh and had to yield the command to Major Pratt. Lieut. Colonel Lewis, commanding the Fifth, fell with a shattered arm, and Major Dudley stepped into his place. Colonel Barney, of the Sixth, received a mortal wound in the temple, and was succeeded in the command of his regiment by Lieut. Colonel Hale. Of the company officers, one after another fell not to rise again, or were borne bleeding to the rear. The men's faces grew powder-grimed, and their mouths black from biting cartridges. The musketry silenced all other sounds; and the air in the woods was hot and heavy with sulphurous vapor. The tops of the bushes were cut away by the leaden showers which swept through them; and when the smoke lifted occasional glimpses could be got of gray forms crouching under the battle-cloud which hung low upon the slope in front. For two hours this went on, and the ammunition of the men was nearly exhausted, when General Birney, having got into position, sent a brigade (Owen's) to the support of the Vermont regiments. By this time, also, the other divisions of Hancock's corps arrived within supporting distance, and were posted along the Brock road. As the position was thus made strong, it was no longer necessary that Getty's front line should hold its advanced position. General L. A. Grant was directed to withdraw his brigade; but how to withdraw it, in the face of the increasing force with which it was in such close contact, was a problem. Discovering a place in front of the Fifth Vermont, where the enemy's line seemed to be a little thinner than elsewhere, Grant proposed to Major Dudley to attempt to break through the enemy's line at that

point, with the support of two of Birney's regiments just posted in his rear, hoping thus to secure relief from the pressure on the rest of his line. Dudley was willing to try, and at the word of command the Fifth rose, and charged the ridge with a cheer. The enemy's line in front partially gave way; but the supporting troops got enough of it after a short advance, and halted and lay down; and Dudley, finding his regiment alone, and suffering from a severe fire opened on its left flank, relinquished the endeavor, and ordered his regiment down. This attempt at a diversion having failed, and the ammunition of the regiments being exhausted, the only available course was to beat a square retreat to the lines behind them. This was successfully accomplished. The enemy pressed close on the retiring line of the Second and Fourth regiments, and occupied for a short time the ground, strewn with their dead, on which they had fought. Lieut. French of General Grant's staff, who had been sent by him to order back the Fifth, had his horse shot and was captured while on his way with the order. But Dudley, finding himself flanked and in danger of capture, had meantime wisely withdrawn his regiment; and the brigade, as the shades of night fell on the field, resumed, with sadly thinned ranks, its former position on the Brock road. Heth also withdrew after nightfall to his former position. "The battle continued," says General Humphreys, "with great severity until near eight o'clock, when darkness and the dense forest put an end to it, fortunately for Hill, whose troops were shattered and his lines disjointed. An hour more of daylight, and he would have been driven from the field."

General Lee, in a dispatch to the Confederate secretary of war that evening, briefly described as follows the events of the day: "Ewell's and Hill's corps arrived this morning in close proximity to the enemy's line of march. A strong attack was made upon Ewell who repulsed it, capturing many prisoners and four pieces of artillery. The enemy subse-

quently concentrated upon General Hill, who with his and Wilcox's divisions successfully resisted repeated and desperate assaults." General Lee was on the field in person in front of Getty, and if he called the fighting there "desperate," there can be no doubt that it was so. In fact, the vigor of Getty's attack was such that the opposing generals were persuaded that it was made by a very much greater force than one division; and it has been stated by Confederate historians that Heth's and Wilcox's divisions of Hill's corps, numbering 15,000 men, resisted that day *five* Federal divisions of Hancock's and Sedgwick's corps, numbering 45,000! But the facts are that the assault was opened and sustained for hours by Getty alone, with 7,000 men, being three-fourths of his division. Other troops of the Second corps supported Getty at a later stage of the battle; but the entire loss of the Second corps on the 5th of May was not equal to that of the Vermont brigade in killed and wounded – a fact which indicates distinctly what troops did the fighting.

General Getty well knew that he had two men in front of him for every one of his own; but he knew the importance of the duty assigned to him. The situation required desperate effort; for if Hill had succeeded in reaching the Brock road, it is hard to see how he could have been dislodged. It would then have been an easy matter for him to hold back Hancock – who as it was did not get into position till after four o'clock P. M. – with one of his divisions, while Wilcox pushed in on Warren's left flank with the other. The consequences can be imagined. Elsewhere, Hancock's lines gave way for a time, and General Alexander Hays, of Birney's division, was killed in attempting to restore a break; but Getty's front was firmly held from first to last against the utmost efforts of the enemy, till the junction of the Orange Plank Road with the Brock Road was made secure. It is no disparagement of the other gallant brigades of Getty's division, which fought well and

suffered severely, to say that the brunt of the fighting of the division fell to the lot of the Vermont brigade. It was a year and a day from the time when their steadiness in the face of heavy odds saved the Sixth corps at Banks's Ford. The same qualities had enabled them to render even greater service this day. But it was accomplished at terrible cost. Of five colonels of the brigade but one was left unhurt. Fifty of its best line officers had been killed or wounded. A *thousand* Vermont soldiers fell that afternoon.

The fighting along and near the Plank road ended about eight o'clock; but elsewhere, and especially in front of the Sixth corps, there was skirmishing on into the night; and till two o'clock in the morning occasional volleys lit up the dark woods with flame. Along the fronts of the opposing lines strong picket guards faced each other with exhausting watchfulness. Behind them the burial parties and stretcher-bearers sought through the thickets for the killed and wounded, at the risk of their own lives, for the enemy's pickets fired at every light or sound. In the debatable ground between them lay hundreds of dead and dying, whom neither army could remove. The men in the lines of battle lay on their arms behind their low breastworks, and got but brief and fitful rest. No decisive advantage had been secured on either side in this day's fight. Each commander decided to renew the contest at daylight the next morning, and hurried forward reinforcements. All night long Longstreet was hurrying up from Gordonsville, with his corps, to the help of Hill; and Burnside with the Ninth corps was on the way, and marching hard, from the line of the Orange & Alexandria road, to strengthen the Army of the Potomac. But as yet there was a wide gap between Hancock's right and Warren's left, and a gap perhaps nearly as wide between Hill and Ewell. Spades were brought into use, and intrenchments thrown up, on each side. Behind the front lines of each army staff officers were hurrying

hither and yon, and troops marching to and fro through the woods, under the starlight for hours before daylight.

Grant's orders to Hancock, Warren and Sedgwick were to attack at five o'clock. Lee commenced his attack fifteen minutes earlier. The fighting soon became heavy all along the lines. Ewell held his ground stubbornly behind his intrenchments; but Hill soon found himself in serious trouble. Getty had remained to aid the Second corps in a direct assault, while Crawford's division of the Fifth corps, which had got into position the evening before too late to take part in the fighting, was to strike Hill's exposed left flank. These movements were successfully executed. Birney's division advanced in two lines, followed by Getty's. In this movement the Vermont brigade moved straight out along the Plank road, with two regiments on the right and three on the left of the road. Hill made a stout resistance; but could not stem the combined assault on his front and flank, and after a half hour's severe fighting his lines broke, and he was driven back in great confusion through the woods, for more than a mile. In this advance, the crowding in of Crawford's troops on the right occasioned a general obliquing of the attacking lines to the left, bringing the Vermont brigade all on the south side of the Plank road. The lines moved forward till Lee's headquarters and the Confederate trains and artillery were in sight, not far in front. Hill's corps was tremendously shattered. It looked much like a Union victory in that part of the field. At this juncture Longstreet arrived with two fresh divisions, and formed them hastily, placing Kershaw's division on the south of the Plank road and Field's on the north. Their lines opened to let through the disorganized masses of Heth's and Wilcox's divisions, and then closing, offered a firm front to their opponents; and Hancock, whose lines had become much disordered in the ardor of the advance through forest, swamp and thicket, called a general halt in order to re-form his lines.

Several hours now passed, during which the commanders on each side were bringing up troops and adjusting their formations. On the Confederate side the routed troops of Heth and Wilcox were rallied and brought again to the front; and the arrival of Anderson's division, of Hill's corps, which had not been as yet engaged, enabled Lee to extend the lines of that corps till his right wing connected with Ewell.

On the other side a single division of Burnside's corps had arrived at the Wilderness Tavern and had been sent to support Hancock. But there was long and impatient waiting for the rest of Burnside's command to come and fill the gap between Hancock and Warren. The ground was so broken, the woods so dense, the movements of the troops, which were constantly mistaking friends for foes and halting and losing direction, were so interrupted and slow, that the further advance of Hancock, who waited for Burnside to get into position on his right before again assaulting, was delayed till Longstreet took the offensive. He had been able to extend his right, and to form a flanking force of four brigades, which, concealed by the woods, moved down around Birney's left and struck him on the flank and rear. "We thought," said General Longstreet, describing this portion of the battle to Mr. Swinton after the close of the war, "that we had another Bull Run on you; for I had made my dispositions to seize the Brock road." But the Brock road was not seized by General Longstreet that day. Getty's division – reduced at this time to two brigades by the departure of Eustis's brigade, which had been sent to the extreme left of Hancock's line – was still holding the rear line between Longstreet and the cross roads. What took place there cannot be better described than in the words of General L. A. Grant's report: "The tide of battle had turned. The front line was broken, and men came disorganized to the rear. The brigade, at the time, happened to occupy a slightly elevated or rolling ground, where the enemy had, for his own use, thrown together two

irregular lines of old logs and decayed timber. The Vermont regiments took position behind these lines of logs and rubbish and awaited the progress of the battle. In less than half an hour the four lines in our front were swept away, and heavy lines of the advancing enemy came upon us with great force. They were received with a bold front and galling fire, and their advance was completely checked and thrown back in confusion. Still determined, the enemy reformed his lines, and again advanced to the attack and again went back. The attack was many times repeated, and as many times repulsed. The repulse, however, was complete, only in front of this brigade. Every time the enemy made an attack, he made a substantial advance upon both our right and left, and the Union troops gradually gave way, especially upon the right. Bullets came from the right across the plank road. Major Pratt promptly faced the Fourth regiment to the right, and opened fire across the road. The state of affairs in that direction becoming critical, it was represented to the division commander, who placed another brigade under my command. That brigade was immediately placed on the right of this, partially facing the plank road, so as to protect our right and rear, should the enemy gain further advantage to that direction.

Perhaps the valor over Vermont troops and the steadiness and unbroken front of these noble regiments, were never more signally displayed. They stood out in the very midst of the enemy, unyieldingly dealing death and slaughter in front and flank. Only the day before, one-third of their number and many of their beloved leaders had fallen; but not disheartened, the brave men living seemed determined to avenge the fallen; and most effectually they did it. For more than three hours did the brigade hold this advanced position, repelling every attack. Foiled in every attempt at this point, the enemy massed forces about one-fourth of a

mile to our left, and made a vigorous attack.¹⁰ Our lines, at that point, suddenly gave way and came in confusion past our rear. I immediately ordered two regiments to face to the left, but before the order could be executed, the enemy rushed through the breach and opened fire into our rear, and at the same time made another attack in front. Perceiving that it was worse than useless to attempt further resistance there, I ordered the regiments to rally behind the breastworks on the Brock road, at which point we had been ordered to rally in case of disaster. Our entire lines, at this part of the army, went back in disorder. All organizations and control seemed to have been lost. But out of that disorder the Vermont brigade quietly and deliberately took its position in the front works on the Brock road, and awaited the enemy's advance. Other troops were rallied and placed on the right and left and rear, though thousands went beyond reach or immediate control. The lines of the left of the Second corps were unbroken, and now took position on the Brock road. Other troops came up from the right, and our position was made strong again, and here we awaited the enemy's attack. It came late in the afternoon; a vigorous, determined and desperate attack. The heaviest part fell upon the troops on our immediate left, but a portion of it fell upon this brigade, and was handsomely repulsed."

¹⁰ General Longstreet had been seriously wounded, by a volley from his own men, and Lee took command in person. At one time, Confederate historians say, he proposed to head a charge; but the men, anxious for his safety, refused to go forward till he had gone to the rear; and he finally yielded to their protest. The abandonment of the advanced line of breast works by a portion of the Second corps, was in part owing to the woods' catching fire. Many wounded men, it has been stated, were burned alive; but it is not known that this fate befell any of the Vermonters. The fighting went on, however, till at last the flames caught the breastworks of logs which sheltered portions of Mott's and Birney's divisions; and they were driven from behind them by the heat and smoke. The Confederates pushed in to the break thus made; but were again forced back by Carroll's brigade of Gibbon's division of the Second corps.

Vermont troops of other organizations and of all arms, infantry, cavalry, artillery and sharpshooters, fought in other parts of the field, and rendered service which will be described in subsequent pages.¹¹

We have seen that it twice fell to the First Vermont brigade to take a most important part at a most important point. It held its position there to the end. The other brigades of Getty's division returned during the night of the 5th to the Sixth corps; but General Hancock was unwilling to spare the Vermont brigade; and it remained upon or near the Brock road during the next day and till the army resumed its movement toward Richmond, during the night of the 7th.

General Getty was seriously wounded on Friday; but declined to leave the field. The value of the service rendered by his division, in this battle, can scarcely be exaggerated. It has been overlooked in some accounts of the battle, owing to the fact that the division was detached from the Sixth and fought with the Second corps, to which corps its work has been credited. But that the service which it rendered was appreciated at the headquarters of the army, may be inferred from General Badeau's remark that "Getty with a single division first reached the critical point and held it afterwards in the presence of double his own force, although Lee in person was in front."¹²

Dear as was the cost of their part of this service to the Vermont troops, there is good reason to believe that they inflicted much greater loss on the enemy than they received. The losses of the Confederate divisions opposed to

¹¹ The Tenth Vermont was in the Third division of the Sixth corps; the Seventeenth Vermont and Third Vermont battery with the Ninth corps; the First Vermont cavalry with Sheridan; and three Vermont companies of sharpshooters with the Second corps. The Seventeenth Vermont lost 80 men in this battle.

¹² Military history of U. S. Grant. Vol. II. p. 113.

Getty's are to some extent matters of conjecture, in the absence of official reports of casualties on the rebel side in this battle – an absence indicative of heavier losses than the Confederate generals were willing to acknowledge. There are, however, some significant matters of record bearing on the subject. Thus the morning report of Lee's army for the 20th of April – the latest report on file preceding the Wilderness campaign – gives Hill's corps 20,648 enlisted men, present for duty. On the 8th of May, General Early took command of the corps, General Hill being sick, and he says, in his memoir, that the corps that morning "numbered about 13,000 musket for duty." That is to say the corps had lost about *eight thousand* enlisted men – saying nothing of officers – in the two weeks during which this battle was fought and in which it had done no other fighting. As the losses in Field's division of Longstreet's corps, are described as "very heavy," Lee must have lost nearly ten thousand men in front of Hancock and Getty; and both General Longstreet and General Wilcox have been quoted as acknowledging that the repulse of Wilcox's and Heth's divisions was chiefly the work of Getty's division. The tables of casualties on the Union side furnish significant indications as to what troops stood the strain and did the fighting of that division. The killed and wounded of the Vermont brigade numbered 1,200. The killed and wounded of the Army of the Potomac numbered 12,485.¹³ That is to say, the Vermont brigade, being one of *thirty-two* infantry brigades engaged, suffered *one-tenth* of the entire loss of Grant's army in killed and wounded in the Wilderness!

¹³ The entire Union loss, as stated by General Humphreys, was killed, 2,265; wounded, 10,220; missing, 2,902; total, 15,387. The losses of the Army of Northern Virginia, as stated in the "Medical and Surgical History of the War," were 2,000 killed, 6,000 wounded, and 3,400 missing, total, 11,400.

The following table shows a remarkably even distribution of casualties among the regiments:

CASUALTIES IN THE WILDERNESS

	Killed.	Wounded	Missin g.	Died of wounds.	Total.
Brigade Staff,		1	1		2
Second Vermont	48	220	29	32	297
Third	40	184	15	25	239
Fourth	34	194	22	45	250
Fifth	34	179	17	23	230
Sixth,	<u>35</u>	<u>169</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>216</u>
	191	947	96	151	1234

Of the missing, five were never accounted for; two deserted. Most of the rest were wounded men, who fell into the hands of the enemy, only a few unwounded Vermonters being captured.¹⁴ The loss of officers was especially severe, amounting in killed and wounded to three-fourths of all present for duty – a fearful percentage. The brigade had no less than *twenty-one* officers killed and mortally wounded,¹⁵ being more than the number of officers killed in all the rest of the Sixth corps put together. Among them were some of the best soldiers in the brigade, and Surgeon Stevens of the Seventy-seventh New York thus expresses the deep feeling aroused in Getty's division by the deaths of so many valued officers: "The Vermont brigade lost many of its brightest "ornaments. Colonel Barney of the Sixth was one of Vermont's best men, a kind yet faithful commander in camp,

¹⁴ Several Vermont soldiers were injured during the first day by the fire from the section of Rickett's battery behind them, the lines being so near together that shells intended for the enemy exploded over the lines of the Vermont regiments. Among these was Sergeant H. E. Taylor, Company F., Fourth Vermont, who was struck in the small of the back by a piece of a shell, which passed through to the other side of the spine, where it remained for four months, before it was extracted. Since the death of President Garfield from an almost precisely similar wound, the case of Sergeant Taylor, who is still living, has been cited as a very rare one of recovery from such an injury.

¹⁵ Including all who died of their wounds.

gallant and fearless on the field, the highest type of a man —a Christian gentleman. Colonel Stone was killed instantly on the 5th; his urbane manners were remembered by all who frequented our division headquarters, and his bravery had endeared him to his men. Colonel Tyler, too, of the Second, was among the mortally wounded, and all felt his loss deeply. Captains Bixby of the Second, Bartlett and Buck of the Third, Carpenter, Farr and Lillie of the Fourth, Ormsbee and Hurlbut of the Fifth, and Bird and Randall of the Sixth, all men of bravery and patriotism, all beloved as companions and valued as officers, were among the dead or dying. But "among Vermont's fallen sons was no more ardent patriot or gallant soldier than Captain "George D. Davenport of the Fifth. His manly bearing, brilliant intellect, ready wit, his "social virtues and well-known bravery, combined to render him a favorite officer. These "are a few among the many names of fallen heroes. Never were grander men sacrificed "for a nobler cause."¹⁶ General L. A. Grant said of the same: "It is no disparagement to those who survive, to say that the places of these captains cannot be filled." *Nineteen* line officers were killed, *thirty-one* wounded, and two taken prisoners. Hardly a company in the line escaped without the loss of one or more commissioned officers, and many companies were left under the command of sergeants by the loss of all their officers. At the close of the battle the Fourth regiment had but three line officers present for duty, and the Fifth but five – several in each regiment being on the sick list.

It is needless to say that the night of May 6th fell on many heavy hearts in the Vermont regiments. Their lines had closed up over the vacant places of nearly half of their number; but they allowed themselves to give way to no sinking of heart; for they still held an important position, and

¹⁶ Three Years in the Sixth corps, p. 320.

meant to hold it, whatever further tribute of endurance and bloodshed the morrow might exact. But that night Lee retired within his intrenched lines. This fact was disclosed by a line of skirmishers sent out by General L. A. Grant, under Major Crandall of the Sixth Vermont, in the morning. These moved out over the field, thickly strewn with corpses clad in gray and blue; discovered that the enemy's front had been withdrawn for some distance; found a large number of muskets, which the enemy had collected on the field but had had no opportunity to remove, and guarded them till wagons were sent out by General Birney and brought them in; but, with the exception of a few Confederate pickets who retired rapidly, they found no hostile force on the ground where Lee's lines lay the day before. Lieut. General Grant acknowledged that the fighting of those two days was the hardest he had ever known; and as he did not propose to attack Lee behind his works, the battle of the Wilderness ended there. It was a drawn battle, in that neither army occupied the ground fought over. Yet as Lee had been foiled in the main purpose for which he brought on the general action, and as his loss was comparatively, though not actually, greater than Grant's, for him it was to all intents and purposes a lost battle. And the Army of Northern Virginia never after fought an offensive battle.

During the afternoon of the 7th, the Vermont brigade rejoined the Sixth corps on the extreme right; and that night the Army of the Potomac moved on to the south, by the flank, through the dark woods, leaving in the field hospitals several hundred wounded men, for whom places could not be found in the trains of ambulances and army wagons, many miles long, filled with groaning sufferers, which had started during the day for Fredericksburg.¹⁷

¹⁷ Surgeon Phillips of the Sixth Vermont, and Asst. Surgeon Thompson of the Seventy-seventh New York, were placed in charge of the wounded men of Getty's division so left. They remained with them for several weeks, till most of their patients had been removed to Richmond, and till they learned that all of the rest were to be taken thither at once. They then made their escape, pushed to the north, traveling by night and hiding by day, and finally reached Washington in safety.

SPOTTSYLVANIA.

In the more open country around Spottsylvania Court House, fifteen miles south of the Wilderness Tavern, Grant hoped to find room to use his superior numbers to better purpose, and to secure a position which should give him a firmer foothold for his army in its overland campaign. He expected to occupy this without serious opposition. But his antagonist, partly by accident, one of his divisions having moved thither in advance of orders, got there and took position before him, and was not dislodged by twelve days of constant effort and bloody fighting.

The army of the Potomac started for Spottsylvania in the evening of the 7th. The Sixth corps marched by the way of Chancellorsville, the Vermont brigade bringing up and guarding the rear of the corps. The trains and artillery filled the roads, and the men were on their feet all night. At Chancellorsville the brigade was detached from the corps, to guard the trains, while the rest of the corps pushed forward. The regiments had halted for dinner, at a spot about four miles from Spottsylvania, between four and five P.M., when an order came to General L. A. Grant directing him to hurry his brigade forward to join the corps, which was to support a demonstration then in progress. The situation in front was this: Warren's corps, the Fifth, had been sent to Spottsylvania by a night march over the Brock road and the most direct route, to seize the position there; but its progress had been impeded by Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry and by barricades of trees felled across the road, and the head of the column was still two miles from the Court House, when, at nine o'clock the next morning, a strong force of the enemy's infantry was

found blocking the way. By noon Warren had developed the fact that he was opposed by a division of cavalry and two divisions of infantry. Reporting this to General Meade, the latter ordered Sedgwick to hasten forward and join Warren in an immediate and vigorous attack, which it was confidently expected would secure the position at the Court House. It was so late in the day, however, before the dispositions were made, and the men were so exhausted by the march and heat, that, though some severe fighting was done by Warren, no general assault took place. The Vermont brigade made a forced march to the scene of action and joined the right of the Sixth corps just before dark. It was then directed to move to the extreme left of the corps. Its movement thither was the occasion of a somewhat noticeable demonstration. The troops of the Sixth corps were standing to their arms and expecting momentarily to move into action. They could hardly be expected under the circumstances to expend much breath in compliments. But the fighting of the Vermonters on the Orange Plank road had been for two days the talk of the corps; and now as the brigade, reduced to half its former size, began to move along the line, the men nearest to it broke out into spontaneous and hearty hurrahs for the Green Mountain Boys. The greeting was taken up by regiment after regiment and brigade after brigade in the line, as the Vermont brigade moved past them, and its march to the left was made under a continuous round of cheers. Its officers and men were sober from their losses, exhausted by four days of fighting, marching and want of sleep, and blown by double-quicking; but the welcome of their comrades put fresh heart into them, and they would have added fresh laurels to those of the corps, if they had gone into action that night. As they moved on, however, General Grant was met by General Meade, who informed him that the intended attack had been suspended for the night, adding some words of high compliment to the brigade for its recent work and

prompt arrival at this time. The brigade was then conducted by a staff officer, in the dusk of the evening, through a ravine and up a wooded hill to a position on the enemy's flank. Here, as darkness fell, Brig. General Grant discovered that his command was in front of the general line of the army, and in advance even of any skirmish line. He knew not where the enemy was, whether near or far. Scattering shots, as of skirmishers, were heard on his flank and in his rear. The position was not a pleasant one, and he determined to seek some other, where he could at least be sure that the enemy was before instead of behind him. After several hours of reconnoitering and wandering to and fro in the darkness, the brigade finally struck a portion of the skirmish line of the Sixth corps and took a position back of it, which proved to be about where General Sedgwick had intended to place the brigade. The men were glad to halt and drop to sleep upon their arms.

Next morning the Fourth regiment was sent forward to the skirmish line; and the rest of the brigade was occupied during the day in intrenching its lines. Finding Lee fairly in his front, General Grant was now concentrating his army before attempting again to force his way. On this Monday morning, May 9th, Lee's lines enclosed Spottsylvania Court House in a semicircle, covering all the roads which converged there from the north and east. The country around is undulating, and was largely covered with forests, with occasional patches of cleared land. The marshy valleys of the Ny river and of the branches of the Po, and the ridges on either hand, afforded excellent natural advantages for defence, to which Lee added extensive earthworks and abates. Grant's lines, as finally formed, swept in an irregular curve outside of Lee's, from the northwest to the southeast, the Second corps holding the right, and next, from right to left, the Fifth, Sixth and Ninth corps. Getty's division of the Sixth corps, commanded for the time being by Brig.

General Neill, was formed in a clearing on a hillside in front of the Landron house, a mile and a half north of the Court House. In front of the clearing was a strip of woods, and beyond that a rise of open ground, along the crest of which ran the enemy's earthworks. Two of the Sixth corps batteries were placed on a crest in the rear of the line. Breastworks of logs and rails covered with earth protected the men.

There was little fighting done this day, except by the skirmishers; but it was a black day for the Sixth corps, for on it fell its brave and trusty commander, General John Sedgwick. As he stood in the early morning, directing the movements of some of the troops which were occupying the rifle-pits at the most advanced point of the Union line,¹⁸ a ball from the rifle of a Confederate sharpshooter, across the little valley in front, took effect under his left eye and passed out at the back of his head. He fell without word or sign into the arms of Colonel M. T. McMahan, of his staff, and was a dead man before he touched the ground. His death brought a deep gloom over the whole army, and in no portion of it was he more sincerely mourned than in the Vermont brigade. Its officers and men knew what "Uncle John" thought of them, and they returned his confidence and esteem to the full.¹⁹

¹⁸ On this spot, on the farm of Mr. Spindler, the State of Connecticut intends to erect a monument to her brave son.

¹⁹ "Sedgwick's compliments many times cost the soldiers from Vermont very dear; for they were the high compliments of placing them on many battlefields in the foremost position of danger – of placing on them the whole reliance of the corps. On many a day he watched them, as the troops moved out of camp in the morning, or closed the long dusty march of the day; – and when, on one occasion in the Wilderness, when the Vermont brigade, returning, after heavy losses, from their march to the assistance of the Second corps, saw the general ride along the lines as they were coming into bivouac, they burst forth in a hearty spontaneous cheer that touched him to the very heart. And when the cheers subsided one of the them stepped to the front and called out with a comic and yet touching emphasis: "Three more for old Uncle John!" The general's bronzed face flushed like a girl's; and as his staff laughed at his embarrassment, the laugh spread along the lines and the whole brigade laughed and cheered as if just returning from a summer's picnic, and not from a bloody field, weary, worn and with decimated ranks. He could appreciate their humor, knowing that no thought of disrespect ever entered it; and a single smile from him went like a sunbeam through long columns of tired men, until it broadened into a laugh and culminated in cheers from the true hearts of as gallant soldiers as ever served a patriot cause." – Colonel M. T. McMahan, Adj. General, Sixth corps.

The command of the sixth corps would now have devolved by rank upon General Ricketts, commanding the Third division; but, knowing that General Sedgwick had expressed a desire that General Wright should succeed him in case of his death, General Ricketts declined the command, and it was assumed by General Wright. He was a native of Connecticut, a graduate of West Point, a major of engineers in the regular army, a brigadier general of volunteers, and had shown marked executive ability in the Department of the South, before joining the Army of the Potomac as commander of the First division of the Sixth corps. He had distinguished himself and won a brevet at Rappahannock Station. He thus brought high qualifications to the command of the corps. He could not make good the loss of Sedgwick – no one could have done that; but the corps had in him a careful, pains-taking, energetic, and, on the whole, a successful commander, throughout the remainder of the war.

May 10th was occupied chiefly in efforts to obtain information, by pressing the skirmish lines against those of the enemy at various points in the curtain of woods which screened them. In one of these attempts the Fourth Vermont regiment, under Major Pratt, drove back the enemy's skirmish line to their intrenchments, and secured some valuable information which determined the point of an assault made from the front of the Sixth corps in the latter

part of the day.²⁰ This assault was part, and the only successful part, of a combined attack on the enemy's centre, made by portions of the Fifth and Sixth corps. The point selected by General Wright, was the apex of a salient of the enemy's lines, which were thrown forward for half a mile to the north, on his centre, along the brow of a hill near the farmhouse of Mr. McCool, and then, turning at an angle – the famous "bloody angle" of Spottsylvania – returned as far to the southeast. This salient was held by Dole's brigade (of Ewell's corps) of Georgia troops. The position was guarded by two lines of works. The first of these was especially strong, the top of the breastwork being faced with heavy logs, squared and pierced with loopholes, like a block house. The storming party which was to attack it was formed of twelve picked regiments, three of which were taken from the Vermont brigade. These were the Second, commanded by Lieut. Colonel S. E. Pingree of the Third; the Fifth, Major Dudley, and the Sixth, Lieut. Colonel Hale, all under command of Colonel T. O. Seaver of the Third. The command of the column was committed to the gallant Colonel Emory Upton of the One Hundred and Twenty-first New York, commanding a brigade of Ricketts's division. At five o'clock the regiments selected unslung knapsacks, assembled in an open space in front of the breastworks of the Sixth corps, and were then marched silently forward to the farther edge of a strip of woods, which concealed them from the enemy. Here Colonel Upton formed his command in three lines – the first consisting of his own brigade – the One Hundred and Twenty-first New York, Fifth Maine, Ninety-sixth and One Hundred Nineteenth Pennsylvania; the second of five regiments of Neill's and Russell's brigades – the Sixth Maine, Fifth Wisconsin, Forty-third and Seventy-seventh New York

²⁰ The Fourth lost two men killed and eighteen wounded in this skirmish.

and Forty-ninth Pennsylvania; the third of the three Vermont regiments. The bullets from the enemy's skirmishers, scarce a hundred yards distant, were whistling through the trees, and the men were directed to lie down till the word to advance should be given. The sounds of musketry and artillery – for, unlike the Wilderness, the artillery played an important part at Spottsylvania – came heavily from the right, where Warren's troops were struggling through the swamps and jungles, to be met by a terrible greeting in front of Longstreet's breastworks and to fall back through blazing woods, in which a number of wounded men were burned alive. Then the Sixth corps artillery, upon the crest behind the column, opened a tremendous fire on the salient. This ceased at six o'clock, as suddenly as it began, and Upton gave the order to advance. His men sprang to their feet, and with hearty cheers, burst out into the open ground. They were met by a sweeping front and flank fire of musketry and canister, but pushed straight onward; reached and mounted the opposing breastworks; engaged the Confederates behind them in a hand-to-hand fight; took 900 prisoners, drove out the rest; and pressing forward to a second line of works, took them also, with a battery posted in them.

The salient was thus carried; and if Mott's division of the Second corps, which was to support Upton, had followed him into the works, it could have been held, with very serious results to the enemy. But Mott's advance was checked by the enfilading fire of the enemy's batteries, and Upton was left without support. The enemy rallied against him in vastly superior force. Gordon's division of four brigades attacked him in front, and the three brigades of Battles, Daniels and Walker pressed on his flanks. It was plain that he could not stay, and General Russell, his division commander, who had watched the movement from the opposite crest, ordered a retreat. Most of the column fell back, first filling the guns they had taken with sods, to prevent their

being served against them. But a number of the Vermonters failed to get the order to withdraw with the rest, and refused to go back, insisting that they could hold the works they were in, and that in fact it was safer to stay than to go. Colonel Upton rode back to them, to order them away; but their answer to him was: "We don't want to go. Send us ammunition and rations, and we can stay here six months." They did stay for two hours after the rest of the column had gone back. During this time General Wright rode up to Lieut. General Grant, and reported that some of his (Wright's) Vermonters were still in the salient and would not come away. "What shall I do?" he asked. "Pile in the men and hold it," was Grant's reply.²¹ General Wright went back to do this; but meantime, under positive orders from General Russell, the Vermont regiments had been withdrawn. Four companies of the Third Vermont, under Captain Kenesson, which had been on the skirmish line, advanced with the column, and some of them were among the last to leave the salient. After the failure of the movement they re-established the skirmish line. Upton's charge made him a brigadier, and is one of the famous charges in the history of the army. That he failed to hold the ground he gained was not his fault, nor that of the Vermonters under him. Had a division been "piled in" to the support of them, there would have been no need of the bloodshed, two days later, which gave to the point of the salient its name of the "the bloody angle."

The brigade lost in this affair, including the casualties on the skirmish line, 88 men, as follows:

	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.
Second Vermont Regiment	1	2	3
Third	0	10	1
Fourth	2	18	0
Fifth	1	19	12
Sixth	<u>2</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>0</u>
Total,	6	66	16

²¹ Statement of C. C. Coffin, war correspondent at army headquarters.

The Fifth regiment lost this day its field officer, the intrepid Major Dudley, who was among the foremost in this as in every desperate endeavor. He died, a few days later, from his wound, as has been more fully related in the history of the Fifth regiment. Among the officers severely wounded were Captain Cook of the Third, and Captain Keith of the Sixth.

The brigade lay behind its entrenchments that night and the next day. The fighting was confined to skirmishing and heavy artillery fighting. The works on each side had, however, been made quite strong, and the men were well covered. About dark the troops of the Vermont brigade were relieved in the rifle-pits, and permitted to bivouac and get some rest in a field in the rear. It was on this day General Grant sent to Washington his famous dispatch: "I propose to fight it out on this line, if it takes all summer."

The 12th of May – the most important of the twelve days spent in the lines of Spottsylvania – opened with fog and rain. During the previous night, Hancock's corps had been brought from the right to the left of the Sixth corps; and arrangements were made for a far more formidable assault on the salient than that of the 10th. This took place as soon as it was light enough to see in the morning, with brilliant success. Barlow's and Birney's divisions led the assault, rushed up the slope to the Confederate entrenchments in face of a severe fire, pushed through the abates, mounted the breastworks at and near the apex of the salient, and captured the larger part of its defenders. Before six o'clock A.M., General Hancock had reported the capture of Maj. General Johnson, Brig. General Stuart, 4,000 Confederate infantry, 20 guns, several thousand stand of small arms, and over thirty colors. Of course, General Lee could not afford to have his centre thus pierced; and he made every effort to repair the disaster. He threw heavy reinforcements into his second line of works, and with Gordon's, Mahone's and

Wilcox's divisions attacked the troops of the Second corps, still in the disorder of their success, and pressed them back, till they reached and rallied behind the outer face of the captured breastworks, where, with a line of skirmishers in front within the salient, they made a stand. Meantime, the Sixth corps had been ordered to support Hancock, and taking Russell's and Getty's divisions, General Wright advanced promptly up to the west angle of the salient. As the Vermont brigade moved up the slope it came under a severe artillery fire from the enemy's guns on its right, and lost a number of men. As soon as it arrived at the salient, General L. A. Grant was ordered to relieve the portion of Barlow's division which was holding the west face of the salient near the apex. He did this, forming his brigade in a double line, and throwing out a line of skirmishers, under a brisk fire of both musketry and artillery from the enemy, now ²² gathering in heavy force in front. General Hancock was there in person, and seeing that General Russell was hardly pressed, a short distance to the right, ordered General Grant to go to his assistance with two regiments, leaving the rest where they were, to face the enemy till he could put other troops in their place. Accordingly, leaving Colonel Seaver in command of the other three regiments, Grant took the Fourth and Fifth regiments to the western angle of the salient. Here General Wheaton with his brigade was supporting Russell and endeavoring to advance through a thick growth of bushes and in face of a severe fire from the portion of the works on that side of the salient that was still held by the enemy. The two Vermont regiments moved forward gallantly and the Fourth took and held a portion of the front line of breastworks to the right of the angle. Soon Colonel Seaver came up with the rest of the brigade, and leaving the Fourth regiment with

²² About 8 o'clock A.M.

General Wheaton, and holding the Sixth in reserve, behind a swell of ground, General Grant put the Second, Third, and Fifth regiments in along the outer face of the west angle, which was in imminent danger of recapture. For at this time, (about 9 o'clock) McGowan's brigade of South Carolina troops, of Wilcox's division, regained the trenches on the inner face of the breastwork, from the apex for some distance down along the west side. And now began one of the most desperate struggles of the war, for the possession of the angle. Says General L. A. Grant: "It was literally a hand to hand fight. Nothing but the piled up logs of the "breastworks separated the combatants. Our men would reach over the logs and fire into "the faces of the enemy, and stab over with their bayonets. Many were shot and stabbed "through crevices and holes in the logs. Scores were shot down within a few feet of the "death-dealing muskets. Men mounted the works, and with muskets rapidly handed up, "kept up a continuous fire until they were shot down, when others would take their places "and continue the deadly work."²³ Some men clubbed their muskets, others used clubs "and rails. General Upton personally attended to the serving of two pieces of artillery, "which, when loaded, were repeatedly wheeled up by hand to a low or open place in the "works, on the left side of the angle, from which the enemy's lines were enfiladed with "great effect. Several times during the day the rebels showed a white flag above the "works, and when our fire slackened jumped over and surrendered, while others were "crowded down to fill their places. It was there that the somewhat

²³ As one of the many similar incidents, it is related that private W. W. Noyes of Company F. of the Second Vermont, mounted the breastworks, when loaded muskets were passed up to him by his comrades from below, and he fired thirty shots into the enemy lying in the trenches a few feet away. The bullets whistled thickly around him, and one knocked his cap from his head, but he escaped unhurt.

celebrated tree was cut off by bullets; there that the brush and logs were cut to pieces and whipped into basket- stuff; there that fallen men's flesh was torn from their bones and the bones shattered; there that the rebel ditches and cross-sections were filled with dead men several deep. Some of the wounded were almost entirely buried by the dead bodies of their companions that had fallen upon them. In this way the Vermont brigade was engaged for about eight hours." The reports of other eye witnesses on both sides fully confirm these statements of the closeness and deadliness of the struggle. The Confederate General McGowan, says: "Our men lay on one side of the breastwork, the enemy on the other; and in many instances men were pulled over. The trenches on the right, in the angle, ran with blood, and had to be cleared of the dead more than once. An oak tree, twenty-two inches in diameter, in the rear of the brigade, was cut down by the constant scaling of musket balls, and fell about twelve o'clock Thursday night, injuring several men in the First South Carolina regiment."²⁴ Mr. Swinton says: "Of all the struggles of the war, this was perhaps the fiercest and most deadly. The enemy's most savage sallies were directed to retake the famous salient, which was now become an angle of death and presented a spectacle ghastly and terrible. On the Confederate side of the works lay many corpses of those who had been bayoneted by Hancock's men when they first leaped the intrenchments. To these were constantly added the bravest of those who in the assaults to recapture the position, fell at the margin of the works, till the ground was literally covered with piles of dead. I speak of what I personally saw. In the vicious phraseology commonly employed by

²⁴General McGowan reported a loss of 451 men, killed, wounded and missing, in this action, including four regimental commanders and twenty five other officers.

those who never witnessed a battlefield, "'piles of dead' figure much more frequently than they exist in the reality. The phrase is "here no figure of speech, as can be attested by thousands who witnessed the ghastly "scene. The musketry fire had the effect to kill the whole forest within its range, and "there is at Washington the trunk of a tree, eighteen inches in diameter, which was "actually cut in two by the bullets." Outside of the angle the carnage was less frightful; but in the bushes and along the ground in front of the rebel breastworks, for nearly half a mile, lay hundreds of bodies of men of the Second and Sixth corps, who fell in the assault. The fight at the angle continued with great fury till nearly dark, the rain falling heavily meantime, and the darkness settling early. It then began to abate but did not cease till three o'clock next morning, when Lee gave up the hopeless effort to retake the salient, and withdrew his men to a new, line of works, which had been built during the night across the base of the salient, three-fourths of a mile back from the angle.

It was about dark when the Vermont brigade, its ammunition being exhausted, was relieved by other troops at the angle, and was sent round to the right, the men feeling their way in the darkness through dense woods, till permitted to halt and rest for the night. There was some fighting done elsewhere along the lines by the Fifth and Ninth corps this day, and the Army of the Potomac lost in all 6,820 men killed, wounded and missing, while it inflicted on Lee a loss never definitely reported, but moderately estimated by General Humphreys at between 9,000 and 10,000 – the larger part of which took place in the salient. Two Confederate brigadiers were killed and four wounded severely, and a major general and a brigadier general were captured. On the Union side General Wright was wounded early in the day, but retained command of the corps, and two brigade commanders, Webb and Carroll of the Second corps, were wounded.

The loss of the Vermont brigade was 254, as follows:

	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Total.
Second Vermont Regiment	19	76	6	101
Third,	9	43	3	55
Fourth,	2	26	6	34
Fifth,	9	34	8	51
Sixth,	<u>3</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>13</u>
Total,	42	186	36	254

This was the last day of hard fighting at Spottsylvania. Next day the Vermont brigade moved back to the left, and on Saturday, the 14th, it moved with the Sixth corps two miles to the south, and was posted on the left of the corps, near the Anderson house, on the Ny river, a mile and a half east of Spottsylvania Court House.

The event of the next day was the accession to the brigade of the Eleventh Vermont regiment, Colonel Warner, which, after two years of service as heavy artillery in the forts around Washington, had now been attached to the Vermont brigade. Marching from Washington via Belle Plain and Fredericksburg, it reached the front and joined the brigade on Sunday morning, May 15th. It was, as it were, a brigade in itself, having 1,500 officers and men in its line – a larger number than was now left of the other five regiments put together. It was finely equipped, ably officered, and in all respects a splendid body of soldiers. With 150 recruits, which were added to the old regiments at this time, this accession more than made good in numbers the losses of the brigade in the campaign, and put new heart into the survivors. The new comers found the veterans of the old brigade physically worn, but stout of heart, enthusiastic, even exhilarated in spirit; for they knew that they had done their duty in every fight in which they had taken part, and they were ready for whatever effort or danger the future might bring.

On the 16th, a reconnoissance was made by Colonel Seaver, with the Third regiment, to the south of Spottsylvania

Court House, to determine the situation in that quarter, preparatory to the next movement of the army by the left flank, which Lieut. General Grant had now decided on. But before putting the army again in motion, he concluded, upon General Wright's suggestion, to make one more attempt on General Lee's left, which it was surmised had been considerably weakened to reinforce his threatened right. For this assault the Second and Sixth corps were again selected, and in the night of the 17th, were moved back to the vicinity of the captured salient, from which at daylight next day they were to assault Lee's line across the base of the salient. Starting after dark, the troops had a muddy and by no means cheerful all-night march through the brush and swamps, getting into position before daybreak in the captured trenches on the west side of the salient and in the rifle pits extending from them to the right, built to connect them with the former line of the Sixth corps. About four in the morning Barlow and Gibbon of the Second corps, moved to the attack in lines of brigades, and the Sixth corps advanced at the same time on their right. The Vermont brigade was in two lines of battle – the old regiments in front, and the Eleventh, which owing to its size was manoeuvred in three battalions,²⁵ forming the second line. The troops of the Second corps, being nearest to the point of attack, reached it first, and found that the enemy was still there in strong force, and protected by formidable works, access to which was impeded by slashings of timber and double lines of abatis. His artillery and musketry swept the ground in front; and though the lines of Barlow and Gibbon reached the abatis, they could get no further and fell back under cover, with some loss.

²⁵ The Eleventh had twelve companies, averaging 125 men each. Each battalion thus had eight platoons, and was handled like a regiment of eight companies. The three battalions exceeded any brigade in the division numbers.

In the advance of the Sixth corps, the Vermont regiments moved through the woods, with hostile shells crashing and cracking through the branches over their heads, and thence out into open ground, to the base of a slope, where the brigade was halted to dress the lines for the charge. Starting with three brigades in front of it, the brigade soon overtook the front line, and was kindly permitted by the troops in advance of it to take the front. Here it awaited the order to advance. The enemy's batteries to the right had now got good range; and the brigade commander's order to lie down was cheerfully obeyed by his command. The rebel sharpshooters were also busy in the tree-tops in front, and Colonel Warner received a wound through the neck, which narrowly escaped being a mortal one. He retained command however, and his men, animated by his example, conducted themselves with remarkable steadiness, in this their first experience under fire. The expected charge, however, was not ordered. General Meade, in view of the difficult and doubtful character of the attempt, had ordered it to be suspended, and about noon, the troops of both corps were withdrawn, and the brigade marched back to its former position, south of the Ny, and on the extreme left of the army. The casualties in the brigade in this affair numbered 37, almost all in the Second, Third and Eleventh regiments – the latter having twelve men wounded, among the number being Lieutenant Glazier, who lost an arm.

After two days and nights spent in this position, during which the lines were advanced about a mile on the left, the Sixth corps started, in the evening of the 21st, for Guinea Station, eight miles south, on its way to the North Anna River. The Vermont brigade was among the last troops of the corps to leave, and as the enemy, aware that the movement of the army had begun, pressed closely on its rear, the withdrawal was a delicate matter, and the duty on the skirmish line – in which the Vermonters so excelled – called

for all their watchfulness and steadiness. In this service, during the night of the 20th and day and night of the 21st, a detail of 200 men from the Eleventh regiment, under command of Captain A. F. Walker, reinforced on the 21st by 50 men under Captain James Rice, all under Major Hunsdon, as field officer of the brigade for the day, took part, and showed their quality, as equal to the best. As a sample of what picket duty was, at this time, their experience is worth describing somewhat in detail. The opposing picket lines, to the southeast of Spottsylvania Court House, were pressed closely together, the pickets sheltering themselves behind trees or other cover. The shooting was so close upon any exposure, that the reliefs could only reach their posts during daylight by crawling out on their hands and knees; and as a rule the line was relieved only at night. All night long the firing kept up at the slightest sound or motion, and the strain of incessant watchfulness was severe. During the morning of the 21st, the men learned that the corps and the army had quietly moved to the south, leaving the skirmish line to maintain a front against the enemy. Towards noon, an order was whispered along the line, to withdraw half a mile to the rear, to a line of rifle-pits which for several days had protected the front line of the corps. The skirmishers could not be withdrawn unseen, and the retirement was accomplished by the pickets' starting at a given signal and making a dead run amid flying bullets to the rear. They were sharply pursued by the Confederate pickets, till they brought up in the rifle-pits, when their pursuers thought bets to halt. There were barely men enough, including the picket reserves, to man the pits with a single thin line. The line to the right of the Vermonters was held by a detail of Massachusetts troops. Here they held their ground till five o'clock, when General Wilcox, of Hill's corps, who had been sent out to ascertain what Union force still remained in front of Spottsylvania Court House, attacked the rifle-pits with two brig-

ades and a section of artillery. He was twice repulsed, with considerable loss.

On a third attempt one of Wilcox's regiments succeeded in reaching and planting its colors on the breastworks at the right of the Vermonters. The troops in that portion of the rifle-pits gave way, and the enemy moved down the line of the pits to flank the small Union force out of them. Captain Walker, however, with remarkable coolness and spirit, held most of his men, and by a sharp flank fire kept the enemy in check till Colonel Seaver, who had been sent back with the Third regiment to reinforce the skirmish line, arrived, when, with the aid of artillery, the enemy was driven out of the rifle-pits and soon retired, having gained no information they did not possess before. Two men of the Eleventh were killed in this affair, and were buried in the intrenchments where they fell, and several were wounded. This picket detail of the Eleventh spent a second night of constant watching in the rifle-pits, till nearly daylight of the 22d, when orders came to follow the corps. They then quietly filed out, and marched, with a single halt for breakfast, till three P. M., when they overtook the brigade at Guinea Station. There the march was resumed with the corps and kept up till after dark; was again taken up at daybreak of the 23d, and was kept up until nine P. M., the last five miles being a forced march to the support of the Fifth corps, then under fire at the crossing of the North Anna – thus giving the detail, as an official report states, out of seventy-four hours of time, sixty-seven hours of about the hardest possible duty, with a fight thrown in.

The Sixth corps halted the night of the 22d at Harris's store, about five miles south of Guinea Station, and the next day, after a hot and dusty march, constantly impeded by the army trains, reached the North Anna river at Jericho Mills, where the army was concentrating along both banks. Here again, General Lee, marching lightest and by the most direct

roads, had placed the Army of Northern Virginia across the way of the Army of the Potomac. The Fifth corps, which preceded the Sixth on the march, after crossing the North Anna on the afternoon of the 23d, was attacked by A. P. Hill, but repulsed him. The Sixth corps hastened forward to reinforce the Fifth; but was not needed, and camped that night on the northern bank of the river. In this movement to the North Anna General Grant abandoned Fredericksburg as his base of supply, which was now shifted to Port Royal, on the Rappahannock.

The losses of the brigade, in action, in the three weeks since it crossed the Rapidan, were reported by General L. A. Grant on the 23d of May, to be 249 killed, 1,231 wounded, 170 missing, total 1,650, of which 1,634 were from the original regiments. Of the wounded not less than 190 died of their wounds; and to these losses were to be added about 100 more discharged for disability, and about 300 who had broken down under the fatigues and exposures of the campaign, and had been sent to Northern hospitals. Less than half the veterans who were in the ranks on the 1st of May, now answered to the roll call, and of the officers but a third remained.

The town of Fredericksburg had now become one vast hospital. Its churches, public buildings and most of its private houses of any size were filled with wounded men sent by thousands from the battlefields of the Wilderness and Spottsylvania. The untold agonies suffered by these in the long ambulance journeys over rough and corduroyed roads, and by many from lack of proper care after reaching Fredericksburg, can scarcely be imagined, certainly not described. Under the enormous influx of sick and wounded men, the hospital supplies and surgical force proved at first quite insufficient. The surgeons stood at the operating tables till their swollen feet could no longer support them, and till their exhausted nerves failed to guide the hands

which grasped the knives. The thousand Vermonters taken thither probably fared better than the majority of this army of unfortunates, owing to the extraordinary efforts put forth by the State authorities for their relief. Governor Smith and Surgeon General Thayer went in person to Fredericksburg, and gave able and unwearied effort to the care of the wounded, and the surgical force in charge of them was enlarged by dispatching thither fifteen or twenty of the best physicians and surgeons in Vermont.²⁶ In the last week in May the wounded were all taken from Fredericksburg to Washington by transports; and from thence hundreds of the Vermonters were sent to Vermont, where, in the large army hospitals at Burlington, Montpelier and Brattleboro, provision had been made for the care of over 1,500 patients. In the year ending September 10, 1864, 2,551 sick and wounded Vermonters were received and cared for in these hospitals, and over 600 soldiers of other States.

The Sixth corps crossed the North Anna in the morning of the 24th, but was not called on to take any part in the fighting which the position of the enemy was developed and the brigade had two days of comparative rest, though in plain sight of the enemy. Lieut. General Grant found that Lee, who had been reinforced by Breckenridge's division and

²⁶ Among those so sent, who rendered valuable service in the Fredericksburg and Washington hospitals, were Doctors G. F. Gale of Brattleboro; J. M. Knox, of Burlington; C. M. Chandler, of Montpelier; C. G. Adams, of Island Pond; W. M. Huntington, of Rochester; A. C. Welch, of Williston; J. F. Miles, of Hinesburgh; D. W. Haselton, of Cavendish; H. Powers, of Morrisville; B. Fairchild, of Milton; S. Newell and H. S. Brown, of St. Johnsbury, and C. S. Calhoon, of Lyndon.

Surgeon Stevens, of the Seventy-seventh New York, wrote from Fredericksburg on the 11th of May: "We are almost worked to death. All day yesterday I worked at the operating table. That was the fourth day at the tables, besides two whole nights and part of another. It does not seem as though I could take a knife in my hand to day. Yet there are a hundred cases of amputations waiting for me. It is a scene of horror such as I never saw. Hundreds of ambulances are coming in now, and it is almost midnight. So they come every night."

other troops, occupied a position so guarded by swamps and streams that he could only be attacked at great disadvantage, and in the night of the 26th, he withdrew the Army of the Potomac and resumed his flank movement, moving on the north side of the North Anna to the southeast, till he reached Hanover town on the Pamunkey River, fifteen miles north of Richmond. The march was a trying one, for the mud was deep that night, and the heat next day oppressive.

The brigade crossed the Pamunkey with the division on the 27th, three miles above Hanover town, and then, turning back, marched two miles toward Hanover Court House. The next day it marched south some six miles, to a position along Totopotomoy Creek, where it guarded the right flank of the army and maintained an extensive picket line, while the army was slowly crowding its way toward the Confederate capital, against ceaseless opposition. During the incessant skirmishing and more serious fighting of May 30th, however, the brigade was not engaged.

On the 31st, the skirmish lines were everywhere pressed closely against the enemy and the pickets of Major Chamberlain's battalion of the Eleventh had a lively day of it, though they lost but one man killed, and but three or four wounded. This battalion was left on the picket line when the brigade left, next day, and did not join it till the next night.²⁷

On the night of the 31st of May, the Sixth corps was detached from the army and sent forward to occupy Cold Harbor, where Grant had decided to force the passage of the

²⁷ "During all these marches, the engagement at Spottsylvania, and the assault upon the picket line, there were only four or five missing, or one in three hundred; and this, too, in a regiment of only ten days' field service, and whose longest previous march was four miles. This is a record which I think, has never been equalled." – Report of Lieut. Colonel Benton, commanding Eleventh Vermont.

Chickahominy.²⁸ The position there was a most important one; for at that point five roads meet, leading thence to the crossings of the Chickahominy and to Richmond, and also to White House, the new base of the Army of the Potomac. The possession of Cold Harbor was indeed essential, either to the immediate investment of Richmond from the north and east, or to the proposed movement to the James, already planned by Lieut. General Grant. Sheridan, with the cavalry, had occupied the position on the 31st after a sharp fight, and was holding it against heavy opposition and increasing numbers, at noon the next day, when the Sixth corps came in sight. The day was sultry, the dust ankle deep, and the march exhausting in the extreme; and the men were glad to halt, even if it were to fight. They arrived just in time to relieve the cavalry, who could not have held their ground half an hour longer. Here General Wright was joined during the afternoon by General William F. Smith, who had moved up from White House with a column of 10,000 men of the Eighteenth and Tenth corps, the latter under General Brooks, the old commander of the Vermont brigade. These troops of the Army of the James, with which General Butler had been threatening Richmond from the south, had fought the battle of Drury's Bluff, and had been "bottled up" at Bermuda Hundred – whence the larger part of Butler's command was brought, under Smith, to the White House, to cooperate with the Army of the Potomac. Immediately upon the detachment of the Sixth corps, Lee had despatched Early and Longstreet's corps (the latter commanded by Anderson) to occupy Cold Harbor and protect the crossings of the Chickahominy. They were not able to do the first; but

²⁸ "Many interpretations of Cold Harbor or Coal Harbor have been given. It has been suggested that the proper form is "Cool Arbor;" but it would appear that Cold Harbor is a common name for many places along the travelled roads in England, and means simply "shelter without fire." – Swinton.

accomplished the last, taking position between the Chickahominy and Cold Harbor, where they intrenched their lines and awaited Wright's attack. Grant had expected this to be made in the morning; but an unfortunate mistake in an order, which sent General Smith out of his way and delayed him four or five hours, and the exhausted condition of Wright's men, after their march, caused it to be postponed till afternoon.

The Vermont brigade, as was so often the case on forced marches, led the advance of the Sixth corps, from Hanover town to Cold Harbor. The veterans of the older regiments of the brigade were especially glad to find, on arriving at that point, that the Sixth corps was to have the support of their old commanders, Generals Smith and Brooks, in the battle which was evidently at hand.