

14

From the Peach Orchard to Cemetery Ridge

Colonel Alexander saw McLaws's division sweeping victoriously to the east beyond the Emmitsburg Road. He saw enemy batteries hurrying from the Peach Orchard, the Federal infantry abandoning the high ground along the road in confusion. He was not surprised—a Confederate victory was inevitable—"Providence was indeed 'taking the proper view.' " The battle had been fought, all the rest was anticlimax. All that the Confederates needed to do now was to exploit their success and bring the war to an end.¹

The artillery would continue to do its part with pleasure. Woolfolk's and Jordan's batteries were already going forward with the infantry, and the rest must follow. Alexander ordered the remaining four batteries of his own battalion to limber up and advance. It was easier ordered than done. They were crippled by casualties in men and horses and fatigued from two hours of tension and firing. Alexander rode among them urging haste and telling them that the war would end that afternoon.²

The batteries moved out as they were able, the slower sections following the faster when they could. The battalion's advance was piecemeal. There was "a general race and scramble to get there first," but even with all of the chaos, Alexander deemed the advance a splendid sight—there was, he declared, "no more inspiring moment during the war" than the seven-hundred-yard charge of his six batteries at Gettysburg. More than twenty guns, and their caissons, like the chariots of the ancients, rolled down the east slope of Seminary Ridge, horses at the gallop, and then up the slope to the Emmitsburg Road. Some cannoneers rode the limbers, and others ran alongside, trying to keep up. To their commander, "they were in great spirits, cheering & straining every nerve, to get forward in the least possible time."³ A fence in the way of Jordan's and Woolfolk's guns threatened to delay their rush. Maj. James Dearing galloped over to some prisoners nearby, gestured with his sword, and roared, "God damn you, pull down those fences," and the

fences “literally flew into the air.”⁴ As Taylor’s battery hurried forward, Cpl. Joseph T. V. Lantz, an excellent gunner, fell beneath the wheels of his piece. Lantz had both legs broken and probably received some internal injuries as well. Some of his crew stopped to help him, but the dying gunner declined their assistance heroically, saying, “You can do me no good; I am killed; follow your piece.”⁵

When the guns reached the Emmitsburg Road, one battery turned north onto it, and it was rolling well when its commander ordered it to a sudden halt. Limbers had no brakes, and quick stops were not easily made. This one must have required a lot of reining in, whoaing, and bumping as limbers and horses pushed into the pairs in their front. The battery commander had spotted wounded men lying in the road, Zouaves of the 114th Pennsylvania and probably some of Barksdale’s men as well, and had no wish to run over them. He had some of them carried into Wentz’s cellar and given water. The battery then continued on, the captain promising that he would return to help the wounded when he caught their compatriots who were still able to fight.⁶

Those portions of Alexander’s batteries that advanced took position on the forward slope of the high ground east of the road. Only Moody’s twenty-four-pounder howitzers occupied the Peach Orchard itself. Probably its guns were just east of the orchard’s highest point, its left piece near the road, and one may wonder how it maneuvered and functioned in an area so thickly strewn with debris and the Third Corps’s dead and wounded. Taylor’s battery was on the left of Alexander’s new line at a point about 150 yards north of the Wheatfield Road and 150 yards east of the Emmitsburg Road. The other batteries were more or less on line between Moody and Taylor. As soon as they were able to do so, the excited cannoneers opened fire on the numerous targets in the fields ahead. Alexander then left them in the care of Major Huger and rode back to bring Cabell’s batteries forward. It was a futile effort. They had lost numerous horses and could not get organized enough to advance before darkness set in.⁷

When Alexander reached the high ground east of the Emmitsburg Road and looked around, he was disappointed in what he saw. Contrary to his expectations, the Federal line at the Peach Orchard had not been the true main line: “That loomed up near 1,000 yards beyond us, a ridge giving good cover behind it & endless fine positions for batteries. And batteries in abundance were showing up & troops too seemed to be marching & fighting everywhere—There was plenty to shoot at. One could take his choice & here my guns stood & fired until it was too dark to see anything more, & both sides were glad to stop & rest.”⁸ Alexander’s different perspective permitted him to see what Sickles and Birney had not seen in the strength of the Cemetery Ridge position, and he saw to his sorrow that the afternoon’s battle would not end the war. There were still plenty of targets, and “a spirited duel now ensued with their new line.”⁹ One of Longstreet’s couriers who was searching for Alexander found the noise so great and the smoke so heavy that he

became disoriented and a cannoneer had to guide him to the colonel. Accurate Federal fire, probably from McGilvery's guns beyond the Trostle buildings, wounded five of Parker's men, two of Taylor's, and perhaps others. But darkness soon enveloped the field and obscured its visible horrors. The darkness also accentuated the flashes from the muzzles of rifles and cannons, from bursting shell and the trails of lighted fuses of shells in flight. The area then took on a festive appearance of a sort. One impressionable young cannoneer of Parker's battery viewed the scene with wonder and, forgetting the tragedy of the day, exclaimed to his battery commander, "Oh! Captain, this is beautiful!"¹⁰

When Barksdale's three left regiments—the Thirteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Mississippi, wheeled left up the axis of the Emmitsburg Road, Col. Benjamin G. Humphreys's Twenty-first Mississippi broke with them. Humphreys saw Federal batteries and infantry in his front. If he wheeled left with the brigade line, he would leave a dangerous enemy force in his rear. They might have been left to Wofford, perhaps, but if McLaws had arranged for Wofford to deal with them, Humphreys knew nothing of it. Therefore, the Twenty-first Mississippi plowed straight ahead after Graham's left regiments and the batteries along the Wheatfield Road.¹¹

Humphreys was quite capable of independent thought and action and might have coveted it. At fifty-four, he was substantially older than most regimental and brigade commanders. He had been a lawyer; he had also been a Whig and had opposed secession. Forty years earlier he had attended West Point but had been dismissed in 1826 for taking part in Christmas "pranks." Humphreys would soon become a general and after the war would be a governor of Mississippi,¹² but that was in the future; there were Federal batteries just ahead for him to deal with in the present.

With the departure of Thompson's and Hart's batteries, Clark's was closest to the advancing Mississippians. Its sections began to limber up when the Confederates appeared on the high ground in the Peach Orchard to its right. It was certainly time to go because the battery had used up its canister on Kershaw's formations and could no longer protect itself against a line of charging infantry. As the teams wheeled their limbers around so that the crews could hook up the guns, the Rebels shot the lead horses of one team. There was a delay while the drivers cut them free, and this enabled the Twenty-first Mississippi to get within haling distance. One of them shouted, "Halt, you Yankee sons of —; we want those guns!" In answer Cpl. Samuel Ennis shouted back, "Go to h—l! We want to use them yet awhile." Some men of the Sixty-eighth Pennsylvania on the road nearby slowed the Twenty-first with a volley, and the battery pulled away. As it did so, one of Alexander's batteries opened on it from the high ground along the Emmitsburg Road. This fire wounded some cannoneers and all of the horses hitched to the caisson of the fourth piece and four of the horses of the team of the third

piece's caisson. Clark's battery had to leave the caisson of its fourth piece in enemy hands.¹³

The battle was just about over for Clark's battery. Its guns and caissons trundled to the rear past the Seventh New Jersey Regiment, which had taken up a delaying position about two hundred yards in the battery's rear and then filed into Trostle's lane, moving on to the artillery park beyond the Taneytown Road. The battery had fired 1,300 rounds, and Sergeant Clairville had cut 241 notches for "Old Betsy" in his tally stick. The holes in the copper sleeves in the Parrotts' vents had worn from .2 inch to half an inch in diameter. Twenty men of the battery had fallen, and twenty-two of its horses had been killed or abandoned.¹⁴

The four pieces of Thompson's battery, which had fallen back from the Peach Orchard and had stopped at the right of Clark's battery, had a more difficult time of it. The Confederates shot down all of the horses of a caisson's team and all those of a gun team as well. Thompson's men abandoned the caisson with little ado, for there was little stigma attached to that; but they freed the gun's limber from its dead horses and tried to move the piece off by hand. Some infantrymen were helping them, but when the Confederates came close, the infantrymen, who had no personal stake in the gun's loss, disappeared. Thompson's men felt compelled to leave it.¹⁵ Thompson's battery nearly lost a second gun here also. The Confederates shot the horses and drivers of its lead and swing pairs and badly wounded one horse of the wheel pair. Thompson and the remaining driver, Pvt. Casper R. Carlisle, freed the gun from the dead horses, and Carlisle pulled it to safety with the crippled wheel pair. In his report Thompson recommended that Carlisle be given a medal, and he later received the Medal of Honor.¹⁶

When Captain Phillips saw Hart's battery pull away, he knew that there was special danger on the right that he could not see. To be ready for it, he ordered Lt. Frederick Lull, whose section was on the right of his line, to reverse the section's limbers and be ready to move back to a rise about three hundred yards to the battery's rear. The chiefs of piece made ready also by uncoiling their prolonges from the hooks on the trails and stringing them out so that they would be available for instant use. About this time, Lieutenant Colonel McGilvery ordered both Bigelow and Phillips to take their batteries to the rear. In McGilvery's opinion both captains were displaying great coolness.¹⁷

Phillips ordered Lull's section to withdraw at once. By this time the Confederate infantry could be seen advancing through the Peach Orchard, but they seemed to be in disorder. For some reason Lull's two guns did not halt at the covering position but went on to the gate to the lane. There both they and Phillips's center section had to halt to allow batteries already in the lane to pass.¹⁸

Before Phillips's remaining section, the first, under Lt. Henry D. Scott,

was able to pull away, skirmishers from Kershaw's brigade worked their way across the Wheatfield Road and into the front of Trostle's Woods. (Where was Tilton's brigade?) From there they sniped at Phillips's and Bigelow's batteries. A minié ball hit a sergeant in the chest, penetrated his jacket near the buttons, and followed the jacket's lining around to the back, where it exited. Another ball ricocheted off the barrel of one of the Napoleons when a sergeant was sighting along its side and tore through the top of his hat. It was hard for the gun crews to work under such circumstances and time for them to pull out.¹⁹

Lieutenant Scott and a crewman on the No. 2 piece hooked that gun to its limber to move it off in spite of the lead and swing pairs' drivers having been shot. The No. 1 piece, closest to Trostle's Woods, had more difficult problems. In response to Phillips's order for it to retire by prolonge and firing, its crew had toggled the rope to the trail and stretched it back ready to be hooked up. When the limber swung around, Cpl. Benjamin Graham, the gunner, hooked the prolonge into the limber's pintle and shouted, "Drive on!" It did not move. Graham stepped to the side to see what was wrong and saw that in the few seconds it had taken him to hook up, the Confederates had shot down the five remaining horses of the piece's team.²⁰

On seeing the predicament of the No. 1 gun, Captain Phillips told Graham to break the sponge staff and to abandon the piece if necessary. Graham replied that the crew would stay with the gun, and they grabbed the prolonge and started to pull it away. What battery commander could have asked for greater devotion? Phillips dismounted and joined the crew, pulling the rope with one hand and holding his horse's reins with the other. The captain and the crew pushed and pulled their near ton of wood and metal over plowed ground and turf about halfway to the Trostle farmyard. Phillips left his crew there, mounted, and rode off toward the gate. He found the caisson's limber there and sent it back for the gun. They saved the No. 1 piece, but it was useless temporarily, for Confederate balls had knocked out half the spokes on one wheel and there was a shell fragment embedded in its hub. McGilvery wondered how they had gotten the gun off at all, for they were virtually surrounded and fired at from all sides.²¹

The two guns had been Lieutenant Scott's special responsibility. He had started the second piece on its way and was helping with the first when a minié ball smashed his cheek bones and the roof of his mouth and knocked him unconscious. When he came to, the Rebels were close at hand, but Orderly Sergeant Otis B. Smith was there with a horse. In spite of the danger to himself, Smith led the horse bearing Scott from the field.²²

When Captain Phillips reached the heavily used gateway into Trostle's lane, he learned that Captain Hart had taken two of the Fifth Battery's guns off with his own battery. This irritated Phillips considerably, but he had no time for fussing about it then. McGilvery ordered him to place his three



Captain Phillips bringing off a gun by prolonge. (The Trostsle barn is on the right.) Sketch by Charles W. Reed (Library of Congress)

remaining and usable guns along with others on a shelf just east of Plum Run and to prepare for more action.²³

Bigelow's Ninth Massachusetts Battery was the last to leave its position on the Wheatfield Road line. By the time that McGilvery had dismissed it with a "limber up and get out," the men of the Twenty-first Mississippi, and perhaps some of Kershaw's men, were passing east from the Peach Orchard against the battery and the last Federal formations in the Wheatfield. Kershaw's men, probably from the Second South Carolina, assailed Bigelow's battery from the front and left; Alexander's guns had opened on it from the Emmitsburg Road; and the Twenty-first Mississippi swept toward it from the Peach Orchard. McGilvery's terse order came almost too late.²⁴

Bigelow feared that if his guns stopped firing to limber up, the Confederate infantry would be on them like a pack of wolves, shoot the drivers, and capture the immobile guns. To prevent this Bigelow ordered the guns to retire by prolonge. He wrote that the guns' recoil propelled their withdrawal and that the prolonges were used to steer them in the proper direction. And yet the limbers had to be there also to supply ammunition and to move the guns between shots.²⁵

The Confederates shot the near wheel horse on Bigelow's sixth piece soon

after the battery began its rearward trek. The driver, Pvt. Eleasar Cole, cut out the fallen animal, and the limber started off again with Cole wrestling with the pole and trying to control the off horse. By the time the sixth piece crossed the field, the open lid on the limber chest, which partially shielded Cole, had thirteen bullet holes in it. Cole apparently had none in him.²⁶

Kershaw's skirmishers shot the minié balls that hit the limber chest as they dogged Bigelow's retreat toward the Trostle buildings. Bigelow's guns fired canister at the South Carolinians in their front and spherical case at the Mississippians coming down on their right.²⁷ Bigelow believed that he had no infantry support when his battery withdrew toward the Trostle farmyard. This was essentially so. And yet there was infantry around. The Eighth Alabama exchanged fire with a regiment posted briefly near the Trostle barn, and the Twenty-first Mississippi's advance was slowed by regiments falling back from the Peach Orchard and by Tilton's brigade, which was in Trostle's Woods to Bigelow's left and rear. Cpl. James J. Donnelly, orderly for the commander of the 118th Pennsylvania Regiment, which was on the right of Tilton's brigade and nearest to the Trostle buildings, fired a carbine at the advancing Confederates until he used up his ammunition. At a lieutenant's suggestion he then jumped over the wall from the woods into a grain field west of it to get a rifle and cartridge box from a dead soldier lying there. It was said that Donnelly shot the color-bearer of the Twenty-first Mississippi before Tilton's line pulled back from the wall and that the 118th Pennsylvania's losses were greater in this position than in any other that it occupied that day. Such support would have been helpful to both Bigelow's and Phillips's batteries as they left the Wheatfield Road.²⁸

When Bigelow's sections neared the gate in the wall, they should have been concealed from the approaching Mississippians by a rise in the ground about one hundred yards west of the fence corner and the gate. By this time the jam of batteries at the gate and along the lane had cleared, and the Ninth Massachusetts Battery ought to have been able to pass through it without impediment on its way to Cemetery Ridge. Bigelow ordered that his guns limber up, and they were busy at that when Colonel McGilvery reappeared. In concise and emphatic tones that prompted understanding and obedience from the hard-pressed captain, McGilvery stated that there was no infantry on the ridge in the rear, that the Ninth Battery must cover the withdrawal from where it was, and that it must sacrifice itself if need be until McGilvery could find some batteries to form a new line of artillery. As McGilvery reported it, Bigelow was "to hold his position as long as possible at all hazards," an expression often used that afternoon.²⁹

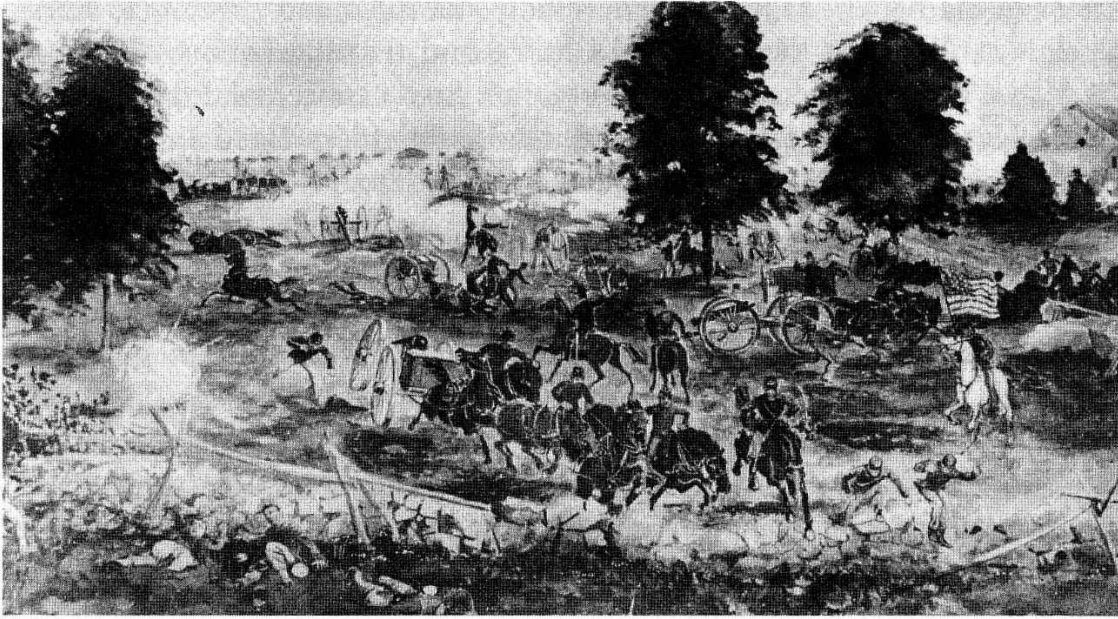
Bigelow had no time to waste. He ordered his three sections to prepare for action and to pile their ammunition near the guns so that they could fire as rapidly as possible. They occupied the fence corner across the lane from the Trostle farmyard, and faced from it in a quarter circle. The left section, Whitaker's, was on the right by Trostle's lane. Both of its pieces fronted

could. In the meantime, Milton's section, which had been belching occasional rounds of canister at skirmishers in its front, moved farther to the rear with each shot and became cramped against the wall. Bigelow told Milton to get his section away if he could.³¹

That was easier said than done. Milton's third piece limbered up, passed to the rear of Erickson's and Whitaker's sections, and proceeded out the gate into the lane. It upset there, blocking the gate until the cannoneers were able to right it and move it off. The fourth piece went over the wall on the battery's left, a difficult thing made possible only by the desperation of the occasion. The cannoneers took some stones from the wall before the attempt was made, and then Bigelow asked them to remove some more, so that the other sections might also go that way. As Bigelow and Bugler Reed sat on their horses by the cannoneers who were trying to open the gap, six Confederates fired at them. Reed pulled his horse back sharply on its haunches in time to avoid being hit, but two bullets hit Bigelow and his horse. Reed then heard a Confederate officer order his men to cease fire.³²

Humphreys's Mississippians pressed Bigelow's battery from the front and extended their line beyond the lane to its right. Bigelow recalled that "the enemy crowded to the very muzzles of Lieut. Erickson's and Whitaker's sections, but were blown away by the canister. . . . Sergeant after sergt. was struck down, horses were plunging and laying all around, bullets now came in on all sides for the enemy had turned my flanks. The air was dark with smoke. . . . The enemy were yelling like demons, yet my men kept up a rapid fire, with their guns each time loaded to the muzzle."³³ Bigelow claimed that no Confederates got into his battery from the front, only by the flanks. The men of the Twenty-first pressed down Trostle's lane and into the farmyard and got behind the battery's limbers. A color-bearer climbed up on one and waved his battle flag while more deadly men attempted to fire from the limbers at the cannoneers working the guns. The Rebels shot all of the horses in the team of Whitaker's fifth piece, condemning it to capture. Sgt. Charles Dodge, chief of the second piece, fired his last round of shot and someone shot him. The devoted, courageous Erickson was shot five times and fell dead from his horse. The animal bolted into the enemy lines.³⁴

When Bigelow saw Federal batteries going into position three hundred or so yards in his rear, he ordered the remnants of his battery to fall back. Whitaker's fifth piece had no horses to pull it, and it had to be abandoned. His sixth piece, which the crew was able to limber up somehow, upset at the gate and had to be left behind. Lieutenant Whitaker, who was mounted and must have been a conspicuous target, was shot in the knee, but he stayed in the saddle and trotted from the shambles. Both of Erickson's guns were overrun and lost. In the final tally it is surprising that only eight officers and men of the battery were killed, eighteen wounded, and two missing. Forty-five horses fell, some near Trostle's farmyard, where they were photographed



Milton's section, Ninth Massachusetts Battery, going over the wall. Sketch by Charles W. Reed (MOLLUS-MASS/U.S.A.M.H.I., Carlisle Barracks, Pa.)

after the battle. Bigelow reported proudly that the battery had fired three tons of ammunition, including ninety-two rounds of canister.³⁵

The men of the Twenty-first Mississippi pressed among the Massachusetts guns as their crews reluctantly abandoned them. Lt. George C. Kempton mounted one, waved his sword, and exulted, "Colonel, I claim this gun for Company I." Lt. William P. McNeily took possession of another in the name of Company E. The men of the Twenty-first were in tall cotton on a Pennsylvania Dutchman's farm—the capture of four Napoleons and a brigadier general was a good day's work, and there seemed to be more booty ahead just for the taking.³⁶

After he was shot, Captain Bigelow rode to the rear about a hundred feet and slumped from his horse. Bugler Reed, who was still with him, secured the help of Pvt. John H. Kelly, Bigelow's orderly, and the two prepared to help the captain get back on his horse. About this time Lieutenant Whitaker rode up and offered Bigelow a swig from his flask. Taking more than one swig, Bigelow "took them in small swallows (all that I took in the service)," and returned the flask to Whitaker. With help from the stimulant, Kelly and Reed got him back into his saddle. In the meantime the Confederate infantry was only a few yards away. The three horsemen continued their ride, but Whitaker could go faster than Bigelow and Reed, and he was soon out of sight.³⁷

Reed led Bigelow's horse at a walk, avoiding capture and death by the grace of God and momentary confusion in the Confederate ranks. They rode directly into the field of fire of Lt. Edwin B. Dow's Sixth Maine Battery, which had just come up to help Colonel McGilvery plug the great gap in the Federal line. The battery's four Napoleons were loaded and ready to fire. An

officer of the battery galloped forward and told Reed and Bigelow to hurry. Bigelow replied that they could not hurry, and that the battery should go ahead and shoot. It did so. The right section fired canister, and the left fired shell, which would have been of less danger to the riders. Reed did not flinch as the projectiles swished by. He guided the two horses with one hand and supported Bigelow with the other, and the two passed between Dow's guns to safety. Reed's conduct greatly impressed both Bigelow and Dow. Thirty years later Reed received a Medal of Honor in recognition of his bravery that day.³⁸

Dow's four Napoleons were a key component in the line of guns that McGilvery was trying to assemble on the high ground in front of Cemetery Ridge. The guns would be about three hundred yards east of the Trostle house, halfway between Trostle's and the crest of the ridge north of the George Weikert farmyard. General Hunt had noticed this shelf during his late morning visit to Sickles's front, but because it was dominated both by the high ground at the Peach Orchard 900 yards to the west and by Cemetery Ridge 350 yards or so to the east, he did not believe it a suitable place for the Third Corps line. And yet it was there and later was useful, and so in retrospect he called it "The Plum Run Line."³⁹

McGilvery put his line together from guns that he was able to intercept as they passed back from the Peach Orchard area, and unfortunately, it is likely that he met only those that got away last and were in the poorest condition. The line formed was not a stable one, and we shall never know what batteries were in it at a given time. McGilvery reported that it included Watson's battery, three guns of Phillips's battery, two of Thompson's, a volunteer battery whose identity he did not know and which escapes us today, and Battery B, First New York Light Artillery, which was then commanded by Lt. Albert S. Sheldon. These batteries were joined by Dow's, which, being fresh, became the nucleus of the line. As the line was first formed, Watson's four three-inch rifles were on the left and Dow's four Napoleons were next in line, followed by Phillips's and Thompson's guns. If Battery B, First New York Light Artillery, was really there as McGilvery wrote, its service was recounted so vaguely as to give it little credence. The unknown battery's position, if it had one, was not recorded. McGilvery's guns faced two principal foes—the Twenty-first Mississippi Regiment and Alexander's guns near the Emmitsburg Road.⁴⁰

While McGilvery tried to form his line of guns, Colonel Humphreys tried to reform the Twenty-first Mississippi and get it moving again. He wanted to shift it left so that it could join the rest of the brigade, but before he could do so, he saw a battery unlimbering in his front beyond Plum Run and preparing to open fire. Wofford's brigade was somewhere to the Twenty-first's right, and Humphreys could not leave the battery there to rake the Georgians' flank. Therefore, instead of shifting north to rejoin the brigade line, he directed the Twenty-first to charge the threatening battery.⁴¹

The battery was Watson's, just back from the Peach Orchard. It opened on

the Twenty-first, first with shell and then canister. Its efforts were to no avail. Young Malbone Watson, two years out of West Point, suffered a knee wound early in this action. There were twenty-one other casualties, and half of the battery's horses were shot. The battery seemed to fall apart. In the words of Lt. Charles C. MacConnell, who succeeded Watson and made the battery's report, the conduct of its men was generally "unexceptional." The battery was "abandoned." Watson's leg was amputated.⁴² The men of the Twenty-first tried to turn their captured guns on their former owners but could not do so. The gun crews had carried off their tools and friction primers, and the guns could not be loaded, aimed, and fired.⁴³

The Twenty-first had to reform again. As it did so, Colonel Humphreys took stock of the situation. He saw no organized troops on the ridge ahead, but some Federal formations were moving south along the ridge in his direction. The rest of Barksdale's brigade was three hundred or so yards to the left and fighting. Humphreys wanted to join it, but the approaching Federal columns would not permit the Twenty-first to do so. There was a crisis at hand.⁴⁴

While the Twenty-first Mississippi spun off Barksdale's brigade's pivot toward the Trostle farmyard, the left three regiments advanced north along the axis of the Emmitsburg Road. The left regiment, the Eighteenth Mississippi, must have been on and to the left of the road until the brigade passed the Sherfy buildings, because it was essential that the Fifty-seventh Pennsylvania and others be driven from the cover of the buildings. This would have permitted the Thirteenth and Seventeenth regiments to advance east of the road on a front two hundred yards wide. The front was broad enough to deal with any Federal units that attempted to reform there. It was broad enough also, as the Mississippians neared Trostle's lane, to endanger the left of Humphreys's division's line and render that division's position insecure.⁴⁵

Barksdale's advance along the road dovetailed with an order from General Birney, now commanding the Third Corps, for General Andrew A. Humphreys to pull back his division's left. Birney was trying to replace the smashed salient at the Peach Orchard with a line that would run between Humphreys's position and the Round Tops. It was a futile thing to do, but only hindsight tells us that. Except for Barksdale's brigade, the Confederates were no longer attacking on a north-south axis, but instead were moving from west to east. And, though Barksdale's brigade provided ample threat to the remnant of the Third Corps line along the Emmitsburg Road, that line was threatened also on its front and right.⁴⁶

Humphreys tried to comply with Birney's order. The Eleventh New Jersey, Carr's brigade's left regiment, changed front from its position on the left of the Klinge house along the Emmitsburg Road and swung back behind the house to form a line perpendicular to the road and facing Barksdale. Although the reports of the Seventy-first and Seventy-second New York regiments say nothing of it, we can be sure that they also pulled back from their

position along the road north of Trostle's lane to positions parallel with the lane and fronting toward Barksdale. It is likely also that the 120th New York, which was on the left of the division's support line, also changed front at this time. This refused line on Humphreys's left should have provided a rallying point for those of Graham's men who came that way and were still inclined to fight and for the Seventy-third New York, which had been posted there before being sent to Graham's aid.⁴⁷

Soon after the Eleventh New Jersey's pivot, its men saw a Confederate horseman, a conspicuous figure mounted on a gray horse and wearing a red fez. They could not have known the identity of the officer, but someone with authority thought him important enough to kill. Lt. Ira W. Corey of Company H was told to shoot him down. Since the range was great, Corey ordered the entire company to fire at him. They found the rider later with five bullets in his body and wrongly believed that he was General Barksdale.⁴⁸

The Mississippians smashed the lines of the Seventy-first, Seventy-second, and possibly the Seventy-third New York regiments without great difficulty. Capt. Thomas Rafferty of the Seventy-first admitted some temporary confusion but wrote nothing more about it. Probably these Excelsiors performed poorly and had no wish to remember this important phase of the battle. Captain Cavada of Humphreys's staff wrote of enfilading fire that dealt destruction, of Mississippians attacking "like devils incarnate," and of portions of Graham's men fleeing toward Humphreys's division, broken and in disorder. Cavada stated that the Seventy-first and Seventy-second became infected by the contagion and broke also, in spite of staff officers' efforts to rally them, and "for a moment the route was complete."⁴⁹

Capt. Carswell McClellan carried the order from Humphreys to the left regiments to form a new line and stayed to see them execute it. Then he returned to Humphreys. McClellan and Humphreys saw Graham's men falling back and saw the left of their own division's line begin to break. Humphreys ordered McClellan back to the left and told him to get the men there back into line and keep them there. Accompanied by a single orderly, McClellan rode rapidly back to the left. On the way he saw General Birney riding in the opposite direction. When he reached the faltering regiments, he found a general stampede imminent, caused, he thought, by Birney's having called to some of the regiments to fall back. McClellan cancelled Birney's instructions and told the Excelsiors to face around and charge, and his unnamed orderly led them. This done, the troops who had fallen back behaved well. It is appropriate to note that McClellan had an interesting idea about troop behavior. He believed that if men were formed close to the enemy, they could not run and would have to fight.⁵⁰

One regiment did not melt away. As Barksdale's line approached, the 120th New York of the Excelsior Brigade waited for it, prone in Humphreys's support line. When the regiments in its front gave way, the men of the 120th stood and, with the help of some stragglers who had joined them, brought the

Mississippians to a halt a few rods in their front. Col. William R. Brewster, the brigade commander, who had been forward with the first line and had been unhorsed, fell in with their file-closers. General Humphreys and the commander of the 120th New York, Lt. Col. Cornelius D. Westbrook, rode back and forth behind their line. Westbrook was angry. He could see Carr's brigade along the road to the 120th's right rear. It seemed to be doing nothing while the 120th was being shot apart. He complained to Humphreys and to Brewster. Neither took the time to tell him that Carr's regiments had, or soon would have, all that they could do to hold off the brigades of Anderson's division, which were approaching their front.⁵¹

There were those who thought that the 120th stood its ground for an hour. This seems impossible—certainly it was not opposing Barksdale's line for that long. It must have given ground grudgingly as Carr's brigade gave ground, until both became a single command facing Wilcox's brigade. Unlike the old Excelsior regiments, the Seventy-first and Seventy-second in particular, the men of the 120th New York pointed with great pride to their performance in this fight and the 203 casualties sustained.⁵²

As Wilcox's brigade approached from the west and Barksdale's brigade from the south, the Third Corps line must have given way to the northeast. To avoid a collision, as Barksdale's line approached Wilcox's zone, Wilcox's brigade veered slightly left. After crossing Trostle's lane, Barksdale's swung right to the east and Cemetery Ridge northeast of Trostle's farmyard.⁵³

Barksdale's drive had been a great success, and it became even more glorious in the golden glow of memory. It was recalled as "forward" and "onward" all of the way. No one managed an orderly account of it—no one mentioned its being slowed by the resistance of the 120th New York and Humphreys's left or its caroming from Humphreys's flank to the east. All of the Mississippians were caught up in the movement, the shouting, the euphoria of success, and the shattering of the blue formations that could not stand against them. Barksdale tried to keep up the momentum, tried to keep the bluecoats on the run. But there also were second, more sober, thoughts: Colonels Holder and Griffin of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth regiments saw that the brigade's line was becoming ragged and urged their fire-eating brigadier to pause and reform. "No," was his answer. "Crowd them—we have them on the run. Move your regiments." Perhaps it was at this time that Barksdale held his sword high, pointed to the front, and shouted, "Brave Mississippians, one more charge and the day is ours."⁵⁴

"Will nothing stop them?" wrote Colonel Humphreys rhetorically in later years. And then he replied, "Yes *death* will do it and has already done it!"⁵⁵ To death he might have added fatigue, disordered lines, diminished firepower, and a dangerous enemy brought to bay and reinforced. One soldier, Pvt. Joseph C. Lloyd of Company C, Thirteenth Mississippi, yelled and panted his way through a wheat field, probably the south end of the large field between the Rogers house and Plum Run, until the Thirteenth neared Plum

Run's swale. Suddenly something whacked him in the arm, jarring him as though a fence rail that he had been holding at one end had struck the ground hard with the other. He had been shot, and the blow halted him in his tracks. A comrade helped him make a sling for his arm and then went on, leaving him to care for himself.⁵⁶

Lloyd caught his breath as the battle swirled ahead of him. Then he started for the safety of the rear. He went but a short distance when he found General Barksdale lying on the ground, alone, wounded, and resigned to his fate. Where was his staff? Perhaps some were urging the brigade forward, perhaps one had gone for help—no one said. Private Lloyd gave the general a drink from his canteen, and Barksdale drank until Lloyd saw water seeping from a hole in the general's chest. And then, at Barksdale's insistence, Lloyd continued on to the rear, leaving the general for stretcher-bearers who would soon be coming to carry him to a hospital.⁵⁷

Barksdale's fall and Plum Run's swale marked the end of the Mississippians' grand effort. It had come far, its charge was one of the grandest of the war. But the brigade was in disorder, its strength sapped by the loss of many men in its mile-long advance. Cemetery Ridge was still ahead, and there was a heavy line of blue-uniformed infantry rising "as if from the earth and . . . moving down upon them."⁵⁸ It was twilight, Barksdale's regiments had no support troops to push its attack home, and the battle was taking a new turn.