

September 30, 1864 Battle of Jones Farm

Extracted from Richard Sommers Book, Richmond Redeemed

"Knapsacks Left On The Field of Battle"

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"Push On.....Without Reference To Anyone Else"

To spearhead his advance, Parke chose his Second Division, the best-rested division in the Army of the Potomac. Simon Griffin led the column north through the thin belt of woods separating Peeble's and Oscar Pegram's farms and on past Pegram's house. Curtin followed the Second Brigade as soon as Ayres relieved him around Fort Bratton. The colonel called up the 7th Rhode Island from Widow Smith's to rejoin him on Pegram's. Hartranft, too, recalled his two detached regiments. McLaughlin followed Hartranft into the Second Division's right rear, and Harriman formed the rear of the column.

The IX Corps now occupied a large open field, Pegram's farm. Woods surrounded the clearing on all sides.

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About 1/4 mile north of Pegram's house and 1/2 mile north of the southern woods, another thicker line of trees separated Pegram's farm and Robert Jones' farm.

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Over this country the IX Corps now advanced. Simon Griffin continued leading Parke's column through Pegram's farm on the Pegram House Road. As the Hampshireman passed beyond the V Corps' outposts near the Pegram House, he threw out the 2nd New York Mounted Rifles (dismounted) as skirmishers. Growing resistance from gray voltigeurs just north of the house led Potter to order more backing for the skirmishers.

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As the crisis of the battle approached, a dangerous lapse of command thus flawed the Union effort. The IX Corps was being allowed to threaten one of Lee's most sensitive sectors, a move sure to provide heavy resistance.

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Startled though they were to be caught in a double envelopment, some Federals could not help begrudging the Confederates praise. "The rebels were bearing down on us like a fleet of war ships....in front and on both flanks. They advanced in splendid, unbroken lines." Potter attempted to realign his whole division but did not have time to do so before Wilcox (CSA) closed with him. Reinforcements only succeeded in sharing the front line's fate. By now Lane (CSA) had swept the orchard clear of Bluecoats and was forcing them back toward the plantation house. **As he kept eating up the Union line from its left, the South Carolinians began closing in on the opposite flank. Most Northerners did not wait for the**

pincers to snap shut on them, but panicked and fled in complete disorder. Knapsacks, oilcloths, blankets....anything that could slow their flight....were discarded; some men even cut the knapsacks from their shoulders in order not to delay in taking them off. Some Federals stayed long enough to fire a volley or two, but then joined the headlong rush for the rear. They were overwhelmed, driven off, or forced to surrender. One North-Carolinian alone took 61 prisoners from there. Then both of Wilcox's brigades closed in to open a deadly cross fire on the refugees "running the gauntlet" back to the woods. Such fire "piled the ground with their bodies," exulted one of McGowen's men.

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This onslaught now broadened its targets as Wilcox (CSA) changed tactics from the double envelopment that had overthrown the Second Brigade to a divergent, two-pronged attack. His main body, all of McGowen's regiment (CSA) and four of Lane's (CSA), battled its way through the woods and followed the refugees southward along the Pegram House Road. Cowan's regiment (CSA), soon reinforced by part of MacRae's Brigade (including the 26th North Carolina), which was just coming up....meantime wheeled west to continue clearing the Federals out of the woods between Jones's and Pegram's. The Tarheels' drive rightward, amazingly, took parts of Curtin's (US) second line completely by surprise. The Bluecoats had previously come under long-range shelling that overshot their comrades around Jones's house, and they had heard the heavy firing in that quarter. "The crash of musketry," indeed, sounded "frightful beyond even that of the Wilderness" to a soldier of the 36th Massachusetts on the left rear. But the men on that rear line actually had no idea of what had befallen Simon Griffin (US) until they saw the Secessionists bearing down on their right.

First to detect the danger was the 179th New York, whose position down the slope of the ravine of the lower fork enabled it to see under the foliage, which blocked the view eastward of most of the second line. Spotting the legs of an onrushing battle line greatly disquieted the New Yorkers.....all the more so because most of the regiment was unarmed. As soon as they came under fire, one of their number cried out, "Let's get out of here!" His comrades harkened to his call, and the whole outfit abandoned their stacked knapsacks and fled southward without resisting.

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Most of the troops did not make it. **Approximately 600 men from the first line were taken prisoner, including all three regimental commanders: Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Gregg of the 45th, Major John G. Wright of the 51st, and Major Everett S. Horton of the 58th. Curtin's (US) second line, Simon Griffin, and Hartranft lost about 700 more captives. Lost, too, were the flags of the 51st, destroyed, and of the 45th and 58th, captured. Well over a thousand rifles plus much booty were also taken from the three brigades. Prisoners, flags, rifles, loot....these were all trophies of the Confederates' elegant victory.** Wilcox, Heth, and Hampton had not only parried with the enemy drive towards the supply lines, but also had hurled it back, wrecking two Union brigades and pummeling a third.

Knapsacks Cut From The Shoulders Of Their Owners

28th NCT / Brigade History

<http://www.28thnct.com/28thNCTBriHistory.html>

August 25, 1864- Battle of Reams Station, Va.: The brigade took part in a minor victory over the Federals. The regiment had to crawl through an almost impenetrable abatis under heavy fire of musketry and artillery and carried the enemy's works with steady courage.. Colonel Speer of the regiment was wounded in the head and died August 29 1864 of wounds. Gen. Lee, in speaking of this fight to Gen. Lane, said that the three North Carolina brigades, Cook's, MacRae's and Lane's, which made the second assault, after the failure of the first by other troops, had by their gallantry not only placed North Carolina, but the whole Confederacy under a depth of gratitude which could never be repaid.

Battle Report, Ream's Station, 28th NCT (August 25, 1864)

Casualties Report, Battle of Ream's Station, August 25th, 1864

Map of Field and Fortifications

September 30, 1864- Jones Farm, Va.: The regiment was second to none in bravery. Both lines were advancing when they met. Some of the knapsacks, judging from their appearance of the straps, were cut from the shoulders of their owners in their hasty retreat under a murderous fire, accompanied with that well known "rebel yell." The next morning the regiment advanced with other troops and helped to drive the enemy from the works at Pegram House, which were held in the rain, until dark, when it returned to the works near the Jones House.

Battle Report - 28th NCT- Petersburg (September 20-October 1, 1864)

Casualties in Lane's Brigade from May 5, 1864 to October 1, 1864 (undated)

Casualties Report, Battle of Jones's Farm, Sept 30th, 1864

Casualties Report, Action at Pegram's Farm, Oct. 1st, 1864

Map and Field Fortifications