

EMERGENCY TROOPS IN THE GETTYSBURG CAMPAIGN

BY RUSSELL F. WEIGLEY*

RIDING along the muddy road from Gettysburg toward Hanover one wet afternoon late in June, 1863, a small boy paused at a crossroads as he saw a lone horseman top a rise and come trotting toward him. The people with whom the boy was traveling hurried on. Southern Pennsylvania was tense with rumors of invasion, the advance guard of the rebel army was doubtless in this very neighborhood, and there seemed to be no point in courting trouble through unnecessary dealings with unknown horsemen.

The boy waited. Youthful inquisitiveness was stronger than vague fears. Perhaps the horseman knew something of the movements of armies about which everyone was talking excitedly. Indeed, as the rider drew nearer, a familiar face appeared above the poncho he was wearing; he was no rebel, but a near neighbor, who had ridden off with the local emergency troops at the news of Confederate invasion.

"Hello, Bill! What's up?" the boy called.

"If you don't get out of here pretty quick, you'll find out what's up. The rebel cavalry chased me out of town about fifteen minutes ago, and must now be close on my heels."

The boy asked where was the rest of the emergency company.

"Oh hell, I don't know; they ran long before I did."

They ran. The incident, one would gather from the general histories of the Civil War, was fairly typical; for in the two words "they ran" is often summed up the whole career of the emergency troops who hurried to rendezvous in Pennsylvania as R. E. Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia pressed across the Potomac

*Dr. Weigley is an Instructor in the Department of History at the University of Pennsylvania, and is currently completing a biography of Montgomery C. Meigs, Quartermaster General of the Union Army.

¹William Hamilton Bayly, "Stories of the Battle," typescript in library of Gettysburg National Military Park, quoted in Earl Schenck Miers and Richard A. Brown, eds., *Gettysburg* (New Brunswick, 1948), 26-27.

and into the North in the summer of 1863. With those two words the emergency troops are likely to be dismissed from the scene.

The two words are not far from the truth, but they are not quite enough. The adventures of the emergency troops were not wholly futile, and even their futility is instructive in emphasizing the helplessness of governments which fail to prepare for contingencies they might well have foreseen. This study, then, focuses on the sideshow of the Gettysburg campaign, the career of the Pennsylvania emergency troops and their brethren from New York, while the main armies groped toward the climactic events at the Peach Orchard and Cemetery Ridge.

From the first rumors of an impending Confederate invasion of the North, in late May, 1863, Governor Andrew G. Curtin of Pennsylvania began to feel an acute concern for the safety of his state.² The commonwealth was practically without defenses of her own, for most men of military inclination were already with the Union armies in the field, and there was no longer even a state militia force with much more than a paper organization. Partly at Curtin's urging, the Federal War Department responded to the first definite news of a Confederate march northward by establishing in Pennsylvania two new military departments. Western Pennsylvania would form the Department of the Monongahela, with headquarters at Pittsburgh, and with Major General William T. H. Brooks in command. East of Johnstown and the Laurel Hill range the state would comprise the Department of the Susquehanna, commanded by Major General Darius N. Couch from headquarters at Chambersburg.³

The appointment of Couch was encouraging, for the general was a West Pointer and an experienced corps commander from the Army of the Potomac, with a reputation for courage and cool judgment under pressure. His principal handicap might prove to be his hostility to Major General Joseph Hooker, the commander of the Army of the Potomac, with whom he would probably have to

² Curtin's concern carried him on a trip to Washington. Kenneth P. Williams, *Lincoln Finds a General* (4 vols. to date, New York, 1950-1956), II, 618. On May 28 the New York *Tribune* printed warnings of possible invasion.

³ *The War of the Rebellion. A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (70 vols. in 128 parts, with general index and atlas, Washington, 1881-1901), XXVII, part 3, 44-45, 55. Hereafter cited as *O.R.* All references are to series I. Also Williams, *Lincoln Finds a General*, II, 618, 629; *Harper's Weekly*, VII (1863), 418.

cooperate. Couch had departed from his corps command largely because he could no longer abide Hooker, whom he considered worse than incompetent. Of Hooker's boasts before Chancellorsville he had written, "It hardly seemed possible that a sane general could have talked in this manner."⁴

Couch took up his new duties by issuing a recruiting circular, calling for home defense troops to meet the impending emergency. Curtin followed up with a ringing proclamation of his own, saying he "knew too well the gallantry and patriotism of the freemen of this Commonwealth" to feel he need do more than commend to them the establishment of Couch's and Brook's corps and urge them to fill the ranks for defense "of our homes, firesides, and property from devastation."⁵ But the response to both appeals was negligible, and the reaction of Pennsylvania to the threat of invasion was for a long time curiously apathetic. On June 14 a Confederate advance guard seized the town of Winchester in the northern Shenandoah Valley, not far from the Potomac, yet even then Pennsylvanians failed to sign up for the home guard. President Lincoln himself issued a proclamation calling for 50,000 Pennsylvania militia, Curtin issued two more proclamations, and still the men failed to come. Apparently the state had heard so many rumors of invasion during two years of war that the real thing looked at first like just another mirage; anyhow, the wheat was ready for harvest and young men were needed on the farms.⁶

Fortunately, New York State had maintained an organized militia, and when Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton appealed to Governor Horatio Seymour on June 15 to aid in the defense of Pennsylvania, Seymour responded promptly. The New York governor was a Democrat and lukewarm to Lincoln's war, but he immediately sent forward New York City regiments numbering 8,000-10,000 men and promptly began gathering 2,000 additional volunteers into companies and regiments.⁷

⁴ *Dictionary of American Biography* (20 vols., New York, 1928-1937, supplement, 1944), IV, 463; Bruce Catton, *Glory Road* (Garden City, N. Y., 1952), 186-187.

⁵ *O.R.*, XXVII, pt. 2, 211; pt. 3, 68-69, 79-80.

⁶ For the proclamations and recruiting difficulties, see *ibid.*, pt. 3, 76-77, 111-113, 134, 136-137, 144-145, 163-164, 169, 189, 217-218; Samuel P. Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers* (5 vols., Harrisburg, 1869), V, 1223; Samuel Richey Kamm, *The Civil War Career of Thomas A. Scott* (published Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1940), 152.

⁷ *O.R.*, XXVII, pt. 3, 138-139.

On June 15 an advanced Confederate detachment entered Pennsylvania below Chambersburg, and the invasion became a reality. Only now did Pennsylvania emergency troops begin to appear, and from Couch's viewpoint they still came forward with maddening slowness. The Confederates obliged Couch by remaining virtually stationary for a few days after their first appearance in the state; but on Saturday, June 20, Couch could still report only 56 officers and 742 men present for duty, exclusive of about 1,700 men of the former Winchester garrison, who had found their way into Bedford in his department, but who were disorganized, demoralized, and lacking in weapons. The Confederates around Chambersburg were said to number about 25,000, and the whole of Lee's army was advancing behind them. The Army of the Potomac was still near Centreville, Virginia, following Lee northward but well to the south and east.⁸

On June 22 the Confederates began to display renewed activity,⁹ and that day Couch reported on his situation in detail to the War Department. Several New York militia regiments had arrived, and with the commonwealth authorities he had organized his Pennsylvanians into eight regiments of infantry and several independent companies of infantry, cavalry, and artillery. A few of the regiments had a sprinkling of veterans, nine-months men who were about to be mustered out when Lee's invasion began. For the rest, the troops were new. The New York men looked "very well," but they lacked confidence in themselves. The cavalry and the pitifully small artillery force were completely raw. Couch knew all too well that such forces would be of little worth in the open field: "I speak of the quality and condition of my troops," he said, "in order that you may not wonder that I do not boldly face them against the rebels in the Cumberland Valley."

The situation was not so grim that the general despaired. He knew that Washington and Harrisburg were supporting him, and he made no impossible demands for reinforcements: "Of course, I would like some old regiments, batteries, etc., but you know if they can be spared from other points." Despite the limitations of his troops, he was not without hope of performing valuable service: "In case the rebels advance in larger force, I believe from

⁸ *Ibid.*, 160-163, 217, 235-236, 243.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pt. 2, 212; pt. 3, 263.

my present knowledge of the Susquehanna we can prevent them crossing from its junction with the Juniata to the Maryland line."¹⁰

From the Juniata to Chesapeake Bay the Susquehanna through most of its length is exceedingly wide, often over a mile, but generally not especially deep in normal weather, and fordable at many places. For the Confederate invaders simply to have forded the river, however, would have left them with a dangerously tenuous connection with the west shore, a connection likely to be wiped out by heavy rains. Accordingly, the critical points along the river in this area were the two places in Couch's department where it was bridged, Harrisburg and Columbia.

Opposite Harrisburg the banks of the river are high. Here by June 19 citizens of the city under the direction of Couch's officers had erected a system of earthworks, covering the bridges and the city, and designated Fort Washington; the works became more elaborate and more extensive during the days ahead. Around Harrisburg Couch concentrated the bulk of his command. At last the pressure of manifest peril was bringing increased enlistments, and by the end of the month he had in the vicinity some 9,000 men.¹¹

To protect the bridge at Columbia, Couch sent to that place on June 24 Colonel Jacob G. Frick and the 27th Pennsylvania Emergency Regiment. In addition to guarding the bridge, Frick was to watch all the ferries and fords in the Lancaster County section of the river and to complete the work, already begun, of removing all boats from the right bank of the stream.¹²

In advance of Frick's position was a detachment of about 250 men at York, including a number of convalescent soldiers from the York military hospital and the Patapsco Guards of the Maryland militia. The 26th Pennsylvania Emergency Regiment was due to reach Gettysburg, still farther to the west, on June 24; delayed by a railroad accident, it did not arrive until the morning of June 26. Meanwhile the 20th Pennsylvania Emergency Regiment was detailed to guard the bridges of the Northern Central Railroad, the line running west of the Susquehanna, southward from Harrisburg through York toward Baltimore.¹³

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pt. 3, 264.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 408.

¹² *Ibid.*, pt. 2, 213; pt. 3, 160, 297.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pt. 2, 212, 278; *Pennsylvania at Gettysburg* (2 vols., Harrisburg, 1914), II, 784.

If the defense of the Susquehanna was Couch's major concern, there remained also the protection of the Pennsylvania Central Railroad westward from Harrisburg, and of the mountainous region reaching from Altoona toward Bedford. Near the latter place, of course, was the Winchester detachment, joined now by several hundred emergency men to muster a total strength of slightly less than 3,000. The detachment was not so formidable as its numbers suggested. North of it were a number of men who, unfortunately, were quick to tire of military life; on June 25 Couch had to report that "most of the men that rushed to arms at Altoona and south are rushing home." Apparently it was stouter souls who held the mountain passes eastward along the Juniata; these men Couch described as "an army of bushwhackers, commanded by ex-officers." Forming a strong point on the Juniata line was a force of about 1,200 under Colonel Joseph Hawley at Mount Union, including the 11th and 74th New York National Guard Regiments, the 29th Pennsylvania Emergency Regiment, and a company of Pennsylvania cavalry.¹⁴

Far from the zone of immediate danger but by now feeling tremors of alarm was the city of Philadelphia. To quiet fears and at the same time to prepare for any genuine emergency, the War Department on June 26 assigned Major General Napoleon J. T. Dana to command in the city. Perhaps it was hoped his very name would restore confidence. The next day Dana reported finding the place almost entirely defenseless, with no more than 400 men on guard, about 600 convalescents in the hospitals, and ten pieces of artillery available. Five hundred stand of arms were at the disposal of the mayor to be issued to any forces that Dana might organize, and the general inquired what authority he had to muster troops. He had assigned a civilian engineer to examine the environs of the city with a view to selecting fortification sites. Soon the city councils of Philadelphia authorized a Committee of Defense to carry on the erection of redoubts; civilian laborers threw up earthworks to command the principal approaches to the city, with the largest of the fortifications established at the Falls of the Schuylkill. The earthworks were to prove unnecessary, and probably no

¹⁴ *O.R.*, XXVII, pt. 2, 213, 328; pt. 3, 326, 345, 389, 447-448.

guns were ever mounted in them; but they cost the city the fantastic sum of \$51,537.37.¹⁵

On June 20 General Couch at Harrisburg welcomed with relief another competent regular army officer and West Point graduate, Brigadier General William F. Smith—"Baldy" Smith to the army. Smith was quarrelsome, but he was destined to achieve corps command within the year, and he was a good officer to have around when affairs were going badly. In particular he was a skillful engineer, and Couch used him to advantage in improving his fortifications and thus increasing the confidence of the raw troops.¹⁶

The fortifications might see action soon. On the morning of June 26 the bulk of the 26th Pennsylvania Emergency Regiment reached the road junction of Gettysburg. The place was not wholly unfamiliar to the men of the regiment; Company A was composed of sixty-one students of the local college and seminary and twenty-two citizens of the town. The duty of the regiment was "to harass the enemy and, if possible, to hold the mountains there." Part of the outfit had been in the neighborhood since the evening before, and from their observations it appeared that General Couch had set up a large order for the 743 men in the command. Along with a handful of emergency cavalry, the 26th stood squarely in the path of Jubal Early's entire division of the Army of Northern Virginia, a division that included some of the most renowned troops in Lee's army.¹⁷

Some years later, when a monument was dedicated to the 26th Regiment, Governor Samuel W. Pennypacker of Pennsylvania was to find this hopeless situation "artistic." "In an artistic sense," he said, "it was needful that Pennsylvania, in the preliminary movements, leading up to the decisive battle of the war fought upon her soil, should take the first step. In a moral sense it was required of her to resent the invasion by a blow even though it should be impotent in effect."¹⁸ One doubts whether the men of the 26th Regiment and the emergency cavalry saw it that way. Nonetheless, an aide of General Couch ordered them to take position to resist the enemy; and despite the protests of Colonel W. W. Jennings

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pt. 3, 347, 365-366; Frank H. Taylor, *Philadelphia and the Civil War, 1861-1865* (Philadelphia, 1913), 245.

¹⁶ *O.R.*, XXVII, pt. 3, 240; Catton, *Glory Road*, 52; *Dictionary of American Biography*, XVII, 362-363.

¹⁷ *O.R.*, XXVII, pt. 3, 264, 344; *Pennsylvania at Gettysburg*, II, 785-786.

¹⁸ *Pennsylvania at Gettysburg*, II, 784.

of the 26th, the regiment formed along a branch of Marsh Creek, which crossed the Chambersburg road west of Gettysburg, and there awaited the inevitable.

It soon happened. Sometime after ten o'clock that morning, Early's Confederates came marching down the road in rank after rank, the Federals fired one or two shots, and Colonel Jennings decided his regiment had better leave the scene while it could.

The Union cavalry detachment fled through Gettysburg and was ordered to meet again at York. The 26th Regiment, hurrying northeastward toward Harrisburg, was overtaken about four miles beyond Gettysburg by a column of Confederate cavalry. With numbers now more nearly equal, the emergency men turned and held their position for perhaps twenty minutes to a half hour in apparently creditable fashion, although the Confederates were able to break into Company B and take most of its men prisoners. Finally the enemy drew away, and the 26th resumed its retreat. The brief campaign cost the regiment 176 men captured and all its equipment and supplies, beyond what the troops carried on their backs. The cost to the Confederates was minimal; the delay mattered little, since Early apparently had decided to pause for rest around Gettysburg anyway.¹⁹

Early spent the night at Gettysburg and continued eastward the next day. On the evening of June 27 a citizens' committee from York met his leading brigade just west of the town and formally surrendered the place.²⁰ Meanwhile the York garrison of some 250 men had moved off to Wrightsville, on the Susquehanna opposite Columbia, where they joined Colonel Frick in his preparations to defend the Columbia-Wrightsville bridge. As the Confederates pushed on again, the 20th Pennsylvania Emergency Regiment, which had been guarding the Harrisburg-Baltimore railroad to the Maryland line, likewise fell back before them, some joining the Wrightsville force, others retiring on Harrisburg.²¹

At Wrightsville, Colonel Frick was under instructions to destroy the bridge if necessary, rather than allow the Confederates to cross.

¹⁹ *O.R.*, XXVII, pt. 3, 344; Bates, *Pennsylvania Volunteers*, V, 1224; H. M. Richards, a soldier of the 26th, in W. C. Storrick, *Gettysburg: The Place, the Battles, the Outcome* (Harrisburg, 1932), 31.

²⁰ Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants* (3 vols., New York, 1945), III, 32.

²¹ Bates, *Pennsylvania Volunteers*, V, 1224.

When news arrived late on the 27th that the enemy was near York, Frick hurried his men into defensive positions to prevent a sudden seizure of the bridge. He placed the whole of his regiment on the right bank of the river. In Columbia he scraped together for reinforcements four companies, totaling about 175 men. Next morning, however, three of these companies decided to disband; the one that remained, composed of Negroes, Frick set to work digging trenches on both sides of the York turnpike, where the road passed between two steep hills before descending to the river. Into the center trenches the colonel put his 27th Regiment; when the garrison from York arrived, its men fell in on the left; the detachments of the 20th Regiment that appeared during the morning took position on the right. Recognizing that they could not hold their line against an enemy force of any considerable size, the Federals laid plans for quick destruction of the bridge.

The structure was a mile and a half long, composed of twenty-eight spans, and built of wood; the fourth span east of Wrightsville, it was decided, would be weakened and if necessary exploded. As an added precaution against the enemy's rushing the bridge, the troops drew a train of coal cars across the Wrightsville entrance, leaving only enough room for their own retreat.²²

Frick's preparations were good so far as they went; the difficulty lay in the presence of the high ground flanking his entrenchments and in the numerical weakness of his command. He lacked sufficient men to fortify the heights; and once the enemy had seized them, his position below would quickly become untenable, thus endangering his line of retreat.

The Confederates, of course, were not unaware of the existence of the Columbia-Wrightsville bridge. At York, in fact, a little girl handed one of Early's brigadiers, General John B. Gordon, an unsigned letter in feminine handwriting that gave accurate information about the bridge defenses. Gordon's brigade moved forward to seize the structure on June 28; with the bridge in his hands, Early hoped to cross the river, cut the Pennsylvania Central

²² *O.R.*, XXVII, pt. 2, 277-278, pt. 3, 163, 410-411; *York Gazette* account, quoted in Frank Moore, ed., *Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events with Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Incidents, Poetry, etc.* (12 vols., New York, 1861-1868), VII, 322; Bates, *Pennsylvania Volunteers*, V, 1225.

Railroad, and attack Harrisburg from the rear while other Confederates moved against it from the west.²³

About five-thirty on Sunday evening, June 28, Gordon's force of infantry, cavalry, and artillery, estimated by the Federals to number 2,500, appeared in front of Colonel Frick's command. The work of entrenching stopped, and the Negroes from Columbia as well as the organized troops took up muskets. The men appointed to look after the bridge hurried to the fourth span, where they removed all supports except the arches and a small part of the lower chords, bored the arches, loaded them with powder, and prepared their fuses. Meanwhile the enemy halted to form his line of battle about three-quarters of a mile from Frick's entrenchments. A column of infantry and cavalry moved along the railroad and drove back some of Frick's skirmishers into the left of the main line; a steady fire from the Federal rifle pits kept the enemy column at bay.

While this action was going on, Gordon worked an artillery battery onto the high ground on the Federal right; two other guns he placed opposite the Union center. With the guns he threw a few shells into Frick's line while he moved infantry around to his left and toward the river. The Federals, with no artillery of their own, could do nothing to stop the movement; even the Confederate skirmishers who approached close to the Federal line were concealed by a grain field. After firing had gone on for a little over an hour, Frick decided that to remain longer would be to let the Confederates reach the river on both his flanks, cut off his retreat, and seize the bridge.

Coolly exposing himself to the enemy's fire, the colonel rode the length of his line and gave instructions for withdrawal. The movement was carried out in good order. The only losses were nine wounded and eighteen men of the 20th Regiment captured by the enemy; Frick believed that even the unlucky eighteen could have escaped had they followed his instructions properly.

After allowing time for all his men to cross the river, and upon seeing Confederate artillery entering Wrightsville and enemy infantry reaching the barricade at the bridge, Frick gave the word for the bridge to be blown. The fuse was lighted; the boom of an

²³ John B. Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York, 1903), 143-144; *O.R.*, XXVII, pt. 2, 464-465.



*Preparing Fortifications near Harrisburg, June 16, 1863.
Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, July 4, 1863*



*Destruction of the Susquehanna River Bridge at Columbia, June 28, 1863.
Harper's Weekly, July 18, 1863*

explosion filled the air; nothing else happened. The bridge remained standing.²⁴

The powder had failed, and nothing remained for Frick to do but to set the bridge afire. It was totally destroyed, in a conflagration of which the *York Gazette* correspondent has left a curiously ecstatic description:

... the scene was magnificent. Some of the arches remained stationary even when the timbers were in flames, seeming like a fiery skeleton bridge whose reflection was pictured in the water beneath. The moon was bright, and the blue clouds afforded the best contrast possible to the red glare of the conflagration. The light in the heavens must have been seen for miles. Some of the timbers as they fell into the stream seemed to form themselves into rafts, which floated down like infernal fiery-boats of the region pictured by Dante.²⁵

At least the burning checked Early's column; but along the roads of the Cumberland Valley, toward the bridges of Harrisburg, an even larger wing of Lee's army marched northeastward. On June 25 Couch in Harrisburg had learned that 10,000 Confederate infantry, 700 cavalry, and twenty-four pieces of artillery had passed through Chambersburg the day before; 10,000 infantry reached Shippensburg by morning of the 25th. The bulk of Lieutenant General Richard S. Ewell's Confederate army corps appeared to be on the move.²⁶ During the 26th Couch could gather no further reliable information about enemy infantry movements, but that night Confederate cavalry approached within five miles of Carlisle. During the night a detachment of the Mounted Recruiting Service evacuated the cavalry barracks in that town, the oldest permanent military post in the country.²⁷

Not until evening of the next day did the enemy enter Carlisle, and on the morning of June 28 the commander of a Union outpost within two miles of the place reported that the Confederates seemed "to count every step of the way." Nonetheless, Confederate soldiers were boasting that they would be in Harrisburg on the 29th. Confederate corps commander Ewell spent the afternoon of

²⁴ *O.R.*, XXVII, pt. 2, 277-279, 466; pt. 3, 410; Bates, *Pennsylvania Volunteers*, V, 1226.

²⁵ *York Gazette*, quoted in Moore, *Rebellion Record*, VII, 322.

²⁶ *O.R.*, XXVII, pt. 3, 329.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 328, 330, 344.

the 28th at a flag-raising ceremony at the Carlisle Barracks, while a brigade of his cavalry pushed forward to reconnoitre the defenses of Harrisburg. If the cavalry reported favorably, Ewell planned to move toward the state capital next day and capture it probably by July 1.²⁸

By mid-morning of June 28, Baldy Smith, acting as field commander west of the Susquehanna, knew that enemy cavalry—Ewell's reconnaissance—had demanded, and would inevitably receive, the surrender of Mechanicsburg, about halfway from Carlisle to Harrisburg. Further reports indicated the Confederates were moving toward their right, so as to reach the Susquehanna near the defenses of the bridgeheads. Correctly, Smith conjectured that serious fighting would not begin that day; but by the morrow the situation was likely to be quite unpleasant. The enemy force which had entered Carlisle, Smith learned, included 14,000 infantry, 2,000 cavalry, and thirty-five guns. Federal troops around Harrisburg totaled, as we have seen, about 9,000, with very little artillery. Couch was saying of his whole force of 16,000 that "five thousand regulars will whip them all to pieces in an open field."²⁹

The emergency men opposite Harrisburg at least were not in an open field; the earthworks protecting the bridges' approaches were well planned. There was some chance that under Baldy Smith's leadership even raw troops might be able to make a stand for a time. Also, there were again preparations to destroy the bridges, if necessary. On the other hand, the river was easily fordable both above and below the bridges, and Smith's defenses were likely to be outflanked even if they could be held against direct attack.³⁰

Thus, the tone of Couch's midafternoon dispatch to Washington on June 28 was hardly encouraging: "By night the rebels will have possession up to my defenses on the river. . . . Their advance has just opened artillery fire four miles from my defenses."

The dispatch prompted an anxious, but notably sane, telegram from the President himself: "What news now? What are the enemy firing at four miles from your defenses?" Couch replied: "They have not up to this time made any show of force."³¹

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 384, 387; Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, III, 34.

²⁹ *O.R.*, XXVII, pt. 3, 385-387, 407, 477-478.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 388, 407, 478.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 385, 390.

The evening of the next day, June 29, found the situation generally unchanged, except that tension was still mounting. Couch heard of the burning of the Columbia-Wrightsville bridge, but he could not be sure that the Confederates in Wrightsville would not ford the river. One report brought the department commander some small encouragement: Hooker no longer commanded the Army of the Potomac, and since the morning of the 28th the army had been in the hands of a man whom Couch had recommended for the post, Major General George Gordon Meade. If the Army of the Potomac could only arrive in Pennsylvania within the next twenty-four to thirty-six hours, Couch must have reflected, Harrisburg might be saved.³² Yet anxiety continued to gnaw everywhere in the state capital.

The situation changed with unexpected suddenness. Governor Curtin continued to believe that Lee would surely attack Harrisburg, but to the military leaders the reports of June 30 indicated that for the moment the city was safe.³³ At first the news suggested that part, but possibly not all, of the Confederate force at Carlisle had left that town and had passed through Shippensburg in great haste during the night. Couch ordered Baldy Smith forward to reoccupy Carlisle. By evening it was clear that while Confederate cavalry remained east of the place, the town had been abandoned by the enemy's infantry, which seemed to be concentrating toward Chambersburg. Similarly, Early withdrew westward from York, with his men saying they expected a battle around Hanover or Gettysburg. During the night word came to the governor's offices that the Confederates at Chambersburg apparently intended to move on Gettysburg.³⁴

Couch had passed his information on to General Meade by way of the War Department, and from Meade meanwhile had come notice that the Army of the Potomac was between Emmitsburg and Westminster, Maryland, and advancing against the enemy.

³² *Ibid.*, 477, 566.

³³ On June 28 Lee learned from a spy that Meade had replaced Hooker and, more alarming still, that the Army of the Potomac had crossed from Virginia into Maryland. With the Federals much farther north than he had suspected, Lee immediately snapped out orders to his corps commanders to concentrate their forces in the direction of Chambersburg and Cashtown. On June 30 Couch and his lieutenants began to notice the effect of these orders.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 427, 433-434; A. K. McClure, *Abraham Lincoln and Men of War-Times* (Philadelphia, 1892), 411-412.

The general-in-chief of the armies, Henry W. Halleck, informed Couch that the Army of the Potomac would move close upon the enemy's right and rear; he instructed Couch to be ready to co-operate with Meade. Evidently the approach of Meade's army was compelling Lee to turn his attention southward. Invasion could not continue with Lee's army scattered and Meade on its flank; the Confederates must either defeat the Army of the Potomac or give up their invasion. Harrisburg could pause for breath. As the adjutant general of the army wrote from there: "The people begin to understand that the fate of this city depends entirely upon the results of the operations of the Army of the Potomac."³⁵

Early in the morning of July 1, Corporal Alphonse Hodges of Company F, 9th New York Cavalry, knelt behind a bridge abutment on the Chambersburg road just west of Gettysburg to fire into a party of Confederate infantry moving eastward along the road.³⁶ Within a short time many of Hodges's comrades of Brigadier General John Buford's 1st Cavalry Division, Army of the Potomac, were firing beside him; soon more and more Confederates appeared over the brows of the westward hills. All day long increasing numbers of troops funneled into the fight from both sides. The battle of Gettysburg had begun.

Some thirty miles to the north, Baldy Smith spent July 1 moving his troops westward into Carlisle. By the time Smith himself arrived at the town about sunset, two of his brigades were in and around the place, with the head of one of them already a mile and a half to the west. During the day rumors had been reaching Smith to the effect that a large enemy cavalry force was not far south of Carlisle; now, as Smith rode beyond the town to find the vanguard of his column, scouts confirmed the rumors, saying that enemy horses were approaching on the York road. Smith turned back; before he reached the town, the enemy was firing on it.³⁷

Smith's troops in and around Carlisle included some 2,000 men and a battery of artillery. All were tired from the unaccustomed rigors of a day's march, and many were still straggling along the roads from Harrisburg. Smith possessed no reliable estimate of the

³⁵ *O.R.*, XXVII, pt. 1, 67; pt. 3, 433, 478.

³⁶ Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (4 vols., New York, 1884-1888), III, 275.

³⁷ *O.R.*, XXVII, pt. 2, 220; pt. 3, 613.

strength of the enemy confronting him. Therefore he decided that the best he could hope to do until morning was simply to hold the town; he might not accomplish even that. Before he could throw out a line of skirmishers, he received a summons from the enemy to surrender the town or evacuate the women and children. The name in which the summons was issued was revealing: General Fitzhugh Lee, commander of a brigade in Jeb Stuart's cavalry division. At least part of that famous division, Smith could conclude, lay just outside Carlisle. Close at hand in fact was the core of Stuart's command, three brigades strong, hungry and weary after a long ride around the Army of the Potomac that had begun on June 25, and now searching in some desperation for the rest of the Army of Northern Virginia.

Smith replied to the summons to surrender by saying he was sending out the women and children. The Confederates apparently felt some surprise that a commander of militia would respond so defiantly; nevertheless, Fitz Lee's men were hungry, and they meant to secure rations in Carlisle. Twice more they demanded that Smith surrender; twice more he refused them, meanwhile sending couriers to hurry forward reinforcements. A battery of Confederate artillery opened fire against the town, but Smith did not deign to have his guns reply. He decided the fire of his inexperienced gunners would be inaccurate anyway, and therefore he preferred to save ammunition.

Again there were hours of tension, but again the emergency men escaped disaster. About one o'clock in the morning the Confederate firing ceased, and except for a brief new outburst of shelling about three o'clock the battle of Carlisle was over. The Confederates burned the cavalry barracks, which they had been able to seize, and before dawn they were moving southward. By daylight they had disappeared from Smith's front; a messenger had brought them the news that Lee was concentrating to give battle at Gettysburg; and thence they now rode.³⁸

Smith spent July 2 in Carlisle, listening to the distant rumble of gunfire from Gettysburg and trying without much success to gather supplies from the citizenry, who were cooperative in spirit, but unable to offer much. The next morning Couch urged him to hasten a new advance; the Confederates were said to have a depot

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pt. 2, 220-221; Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, III, 137, 138.



THE BATTAL DRILLING THE NEW YORK MILITIA IN THE MAIN STREET OF CARLISLE, PENNSYLVANIA.—DRAWING BY MR. TOWNSEND.

Harper's Weekly, July 25, 1863

of stolen horses and baggage at Cashtown, between Gettysburg and Chambersburg, and Couch hoped that Smith might be able to gobble it up. On July 3 there came also a call for activity from General Meade. Precisely what the dull roar from Gettysburg signified had been hidden in a cloud of rumor, but Meade now told Couch that his operations might result in the enemy's withdrawal; prompt cooperation from Couch might make possible Lee's destruction. Said Meade: "The sound of my guns for these three days, it is taken for granted, is all the additional notice you need to come on."³⁹

Meade was taking pretty much for granted. For one thing, he failed to reckon with the peculiar difficulties of handling totally inexperienced troops. Couch's command was not completely inactive on July 3; the Bedford detachment began to move toward McConnellsburg and Chambersburg to harass the enemy's rear, and a detachment of the 1st New York Cavalry scouted near Chambersburg. But Smith reported from Carlisle that he would be unable to move even that night. He was still awaiting supplies. He believed some of his men had deserted. Worst of all, "My ammunition has not yet come up, and I don't know if my ordnance officer knows enough to bring it."⁴⁰

Before the Gettysburg campaign ended, Couch's department was able to muster considerable numerical strength. Couch organized his troops into two divisions. The 1st Division, under Baldy Smith, included eleven New York National Guard regiments, five Pennsylvania emergency infantry regiments, two companies of Pennsylvania emergency cavalry, and two batteries of Pennsylvania artillery. The 2nd Division, under General Dana, who was summoned from Philadelphia, comprised two New York National Guard regiments, fifteen Pennsylvania emergency regiments, a battery of regular artillery, and a New York National Guard battery. Smith's division totaled about 7,000 men, Dana's over 12,000. Several Pennsylvania emergency detachments remained unassigned to either division.⁴¹

Yet all these troops were unable to assist in any important way in pursuing Lee and bringing him to bay north of the Potomac. No one was able to improvise in rapid order a satisfactory supply

³⁹ *O.R.*, XXVII, pt. 3, 499, 501.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 506-508.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 613, 640-643, 663, 677-679.

system, and the Susquehanna troops accordingly faced constant logistical difficulties. Straggling and desertions plagued all marches. When Baldy Smith did get part of his division as far south as Waynesboro, he feared to advance farther, and rightly so, because of reports that the enemy's army at the time was concentrated just below him at Hagerstown. The Army of the Potomac itself failed to press forward with much vigor, and in the end Lee's army escaped into Virginia.⁴²

Thus, little glory crowned the banners of the emergency men when presently they returned to their homes. The function for which they had first been intended, to slow Lee's advance into the North through delaying actions, for the most part they had not needed to perform, because the Army of the Potomac had arrived in Maryland and Pennsylvania before Lee could make a disastrously deep penetration of the area. In pursuit of the Confederate retreat their commanders had been extremely cautious, but the quality of the emergency troops made caution necessary.

Nevertheless, the record of the emergency troops was not without heartening features. Couch, Smith, and their assistants acted with considerable skill in molding their green recruits into something resembling a departmental army corps, in distributing the troops to the places where they would be of most value, and in keeping their raw soldiers generally fit for campaigning. Governor Curtin cooperated with energy. The emergency men themselves enlisted to perform a singularly uninviting task: to oppose without training troops who had acquired a reputation for invincibility. Yet, with surprisingly few exceptions, the men of the Department of the Susquehanna did everything that was asked of them to the best of their ability. More than that could not have been required.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pt. 2, 212, 222-223; pt. 3, 499, 514, 518, 515, 527, 574, 577, 621-622, 633, 635, 663, 667, 700; Williams, *Lincoln Finds a General*, II, 744, 748-749.