

## HIGHWATER 1863: THE CONFEDERATE APPROACH TO HARRISBURG

BY ROBERT GRANT CRIST\*

**A**T THE end of June, 1863, Harrisburg almost fell victim to the Confederate invasion. Its suburbs on the west side of the Susquehanna River had surrendered or were occupied by enemy troops. Its defenses were meaningless earthworks manned by militia who would not have delayed a determined advance for any significant length of time. But Harrisburg did not fall.

Yet to Pennsylvanians who watched defending troops and invaders alike ransack their homes, the squalls at Oyster Point 2.3 miles from the city seemed as calamitous as the great storm at Gettysburg; and, although the breakers pounded on Adams County, the surf rolled north to the hills overlooking Dauphin County. The object of this paper is to examine the foremost eddy which all but washed into the capital city of Pennsylvania and over the uniformed men who gathered to bar the way. The hills and the men deserve a closer look.

Both of the contending forces had anticipated that any military advance north from the Maryland border would proceed up the Cumberland Valley to Harrisburg. As early as February, 1863, General R. E. Lee had ordered his agents, particularly Jed Hotchkiss, to prepare maps of the Valley; and the Philadelphia Home Guard engineers had thoroughly studied the region in 1861. Their report concluded that the Confederates would cross "at Harrisburg . . . the weakest and most assailable position. . . ."<sup>1</sup> The Susquehanna River could be crossed at three places directly into the city: by the 4,300-foot "traveling" or "Camel Back" wagon and pedestrian bridge, by the 4,277-foot Cumberland Valley Rail-

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<sup>1</sup>MS., Military Survey of the Susquehanna River—1861, A Report to Brig. Gen. Pleasonton, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



Map by Col. W. S. Nye

AREA OF THE CONFEDERATE APPROACH TO HARRISBURG

road Bridge a few hundred feet south, and by a ford which ran only a short distance south of the railroad crossing. These were the points to which an enemy would surely head. However, two other bridges could be found immediately to the north. Four miles above the city the 4,700-foot Pennsylvania Railroad Bridge spanned the river south of Marysville. Within sight to the north stood the 4,500-foot Northern Central Railroad Bridge.

Further to orient the reader, the town immediately at the west end of the Harrisburg bridges was, appropriately, Bridgeport. Into this West Shore town led three major roads: the highway from York in the south, the route from Marysville in the north, and the Chambersburg and Harrisburg Turnpike from Carlisle in the west. From Bridgeport the closest village to the south was New Cumberland, at a distance of one and one-half miles. To the north lay contiguously the tiny town of Wormleysburg, hugging the river bank. To the west at 1.7 miles the traveler encountered White Hall, a hamlet of 21 buildings lying between modern 17th and 32nd Streets, Camp Hill. In White Hall lay Oyster Point, then a V-shaped intersection of the Turnpike with the Trindle Springs Road through Mechanicsburg to Carlisle.

To defend the Harrisburg area against Lee's invasion of 1863, President Lincoln on June 16 issued calls for militia in the Middle Atlantic states to assemble and meet the invaders. Earlier appeals by Pennsylvania's Governor Andrew Curtin and by the new military authorities had proved unsuccessful. Pennsylvania dallied. Explanations of the delay varied. If you were a Democrat, you were likely to argue that the Republican state government and the Republican United States government were at cross purposes, each offering varying terms of enlistment and pay. If a Republican, you were inclined to suggest "Copperheads" were behind the bickering. The *New York Times* reporter said it was a matter of patriotism having worn thin,<sup>2</sup> an explanation which could be substantiated by showing that there had been 130,000 Pennsylvanians in uniform in 1861, and 71,000 in 1862. If you were not particularly politically minded but yet a bit nationalistic about Pennsylvania, you expressed regret that the two military department commanders involved in Pennsylvania defense were from other

<sup>2</sup> July 9, 1863.

states. If you were an average wage-earner, you would recall that the militia, called out nine months before, had still not been paid for the prior tour of duty. If you were a Central Pennsylvania farmer, your concern lay with the ever-undone work in the fields; June was haying time, and the crop was bringing exceptionally high prices because of army needs. Finally, many men unquestionably hesitated to rush to arms until the threat became in their own opinion more pressing than it appeared in mid-June 1863.

Newspaper editors thundered protests from their offices: "Discard criminal lethargy and enlist";<sup>3</sup> "Our coal mines will be destroyed. . . . You can avoid the draft by volunteering";<sup>4</sup> "Lincoln's call is three weeks too late [but] let every able-bodied man . . . rally to arms";<sup>5</sup> "Only 60 men [on June 25] from the Harrisburg area have enlisted, of the 25,000 men there. . . . We call on Pennsylvania to wake up, arm, organize";<sup>6</sup> and the like. However, the urgency was in large part lost on the state. An example of the delay was Philadelphia, which received a special plea from Mayor Alexander Henry: "Close your businesses . . . you can delay no longer."<sup>7</sup>

In Harrisburg the answer was for the Democratic mayor, A. S. Roumfort, to call an 11 a.m. meeting in the Dauphin County Courthouse.<sup>8</sup> Into it marched the Republican governor; his factional opponent, Simon Cameron; Cameron's former assistant in the War Department, Thomas A. Scott; the department military commander appointed earlier in the week, Major General Darius Nash Couch. As did everything else in Harrisburg, the meeting wallowed in politics.

Cameron, from the height of his deputation as the former Secretary of War, was chairman and dominated the accounts of the meeting. He predicted that Lee would not be foolish enough to invade far enough to deliver a blow at the capital, but that if he did, he (Cameron) would personally shoulder a musket and go as a private, *if* the governor personally would lead the militia into

<sup>3</sup> *Carlisle Herald*, June 19, 1863.

<sup>4</sup> *Wilkes-Barre Record*, June 17, 1863.

<sup>5</sup> *Lewistown True Democrat*, June 17, 1863.

<sup>6</sup> *Lancaster Express*, June 27, 1863, quoting *New York Times*, June 26, 1863.

<sup>7</sup> *Harrisburg Daily Telegraph*, June 29, 1863.

<sup>8</sup> The account which follows is based on reports in the *New York Herald*, the *New York Times*, and the *Harrisburg Daily Telegraph*.

the field. An added fillip was his suggestion that he would serve under any man sent to organize the defenses, including General George B. McClellan (who seventeen months later would carry Harrisburg against Lincoln). The suggestion was inappropriate because a competent man had already been assigned to the job, but Democratic papers gleefully reported the story, interpreting it as a sign of Republican dissatisfaction.

Before adjourning the meeting from Cameron's harangue, the men present agreed to recruit "1,000 true citizens" to help dig defenses for the city and to pledge "the last man in the defenses of the State."<sup>9</sup>

Acting on the first promise, by late afternoon on the 15th a substantial band of men did present themselves at the Bridgeport end of the Susquehanna bridges to begin manual labor under the direction of Major James Brady, of the Pennsylvania Volunteer Artillery, Mr. John A. Wilson, an engineer provided by the versatile Scott, and others.

The site was one that had been selected in 1861 by a survey party sent out by the Philadelphia Home Guard. Their report stated: "at the first appearance of danger it is to be occupied and fortified."<sup>10</sup> The same site had been occupied the previous autumn by the Pennsylvania Zouaves, when digging may have been begun. A west shore man said that engineers in the early months of 1863 had staked out the site.<sup>11</sup> In 1863, however, there was much for the "true citizens" to complete. They worked with blister-raising vigor, laboring through several hot days and insect-ridden nights to the light of bonfires. Using only hand tools, they moved a remarkably large quantity of shale. The scene of their labor was a sixty-acre plot on the high ground overlooking the Camel Back Bridge. Intriguingly, the Philadelphia *Press* referred to the location as "one of the sites proposed for the National Capitol."<sup>12</sup> It was known variously as "Hummel's Hill" for the landowners, and as "Bridgeport Heights" in reference to the town at the base.

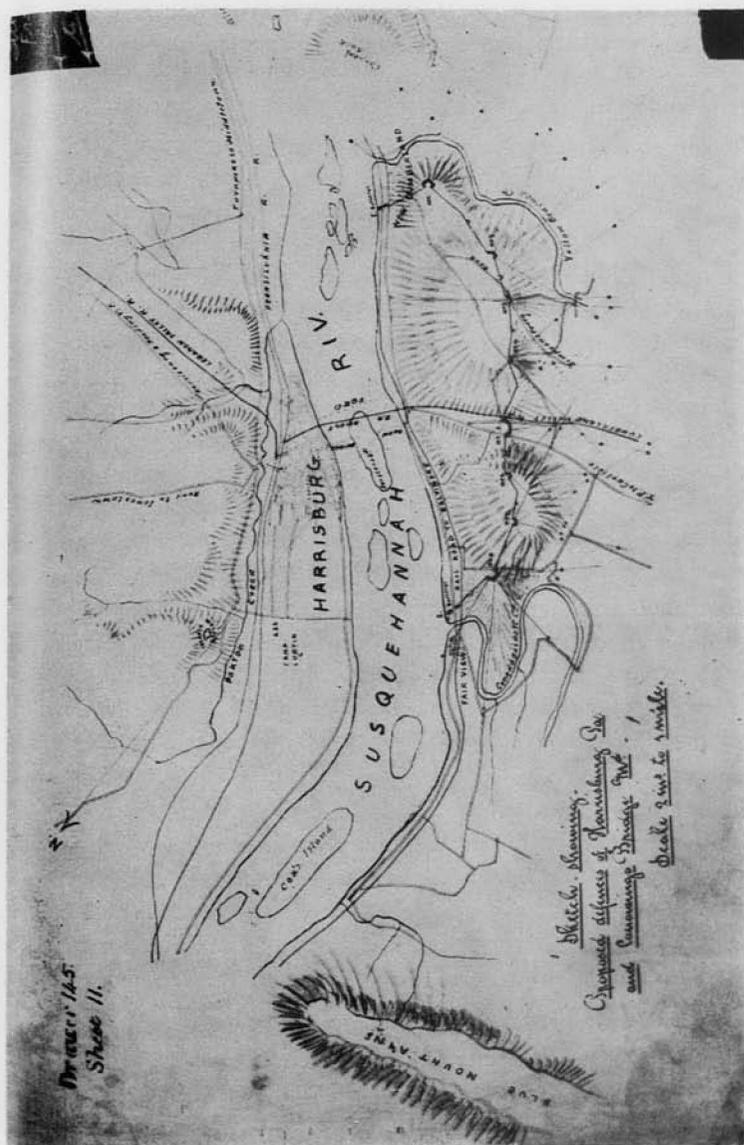
Idle "contrabands" who had fled the advancing Confederates were enrolled for digging duty at \$1.25 per ten-hour day. After

<sup>9</sup> Harrisburg *Daily Telegraph*, June 15, 1863.

<sup>10</sup> Military Survey of the Susquehanna River, *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> Conway P. Wing, *History of Cumberland County* (Philadelphia, 1879), 214.

<sup>12</sup> June 17, 1863.



The National Archives

1862 SKETCH OF THE PROPOSED DEFENSES OF HARRISBURG

July 1, when the threat was diminishing, the wage was dropped to 75 cents.<sup>13</sup> Scott produced 500 laborers from the railroad and canal system to help the militia, who, as diggers, "proved of little service."<sup>14</sup> From the Harrisburg Car Company and the McCormick rolling mills also came "strong hands."<sup>15</sup>

At the end of three days the New York *Herald* could report: "The forts are a ditch and entrenchment one mile in length, constructed so guns can sweep approaches to it . . . semi-circular, running along the slopes and summit of a hill or bluff. . . ."<sup>16</sup> On the fourth day of the digging Captain J. B. Wheeler, newly-named departmental engineer, reported to Harrisburg from West Point. He did not like the design of the forts but decided not to interfere with the layout, as so much work had been done on them. However, as soon as he could, he transferred most of the laborers to tree-cutting details in order to clear away potential hiding places for the enemy. Just what Wheeler would have designed had he been present in the beginning is not known, but perhaps it would have been the chain of forts linking the Conodoguinet and Yellow Breeches Creeks which had been advocated in 1862.<sup>17</sup>

General Couch designated the sixty acres "Fort Washington" on June 28 in an apparent effort to give it a name upon which the New York and Pennsylvania garrisons could agree. Previously the New York contingent had officially dubbed it "Fort Seymour"<sup>18</sup> for their governor, and the Pennsylvanians were terming it "*Camp Couch*."<sup>19</sup>

When Fort Washington was reasonably complete, the work force moved .6 mile to the west on the same ridge of land and started digging what became known as *Fort Couch*. This location, if it had been occupied by an enemy, would have made untenable the main position at the end of the bridges. Time did not permit the completion of this "fort" much beyond the remnant which

<sup>13</sup> Captain J. B. Wheeler, Report to Chief Engineer, U. S. Army, August 31, 1863. National Archives Record Group 77, Records of the Office of the Chief Engineer.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

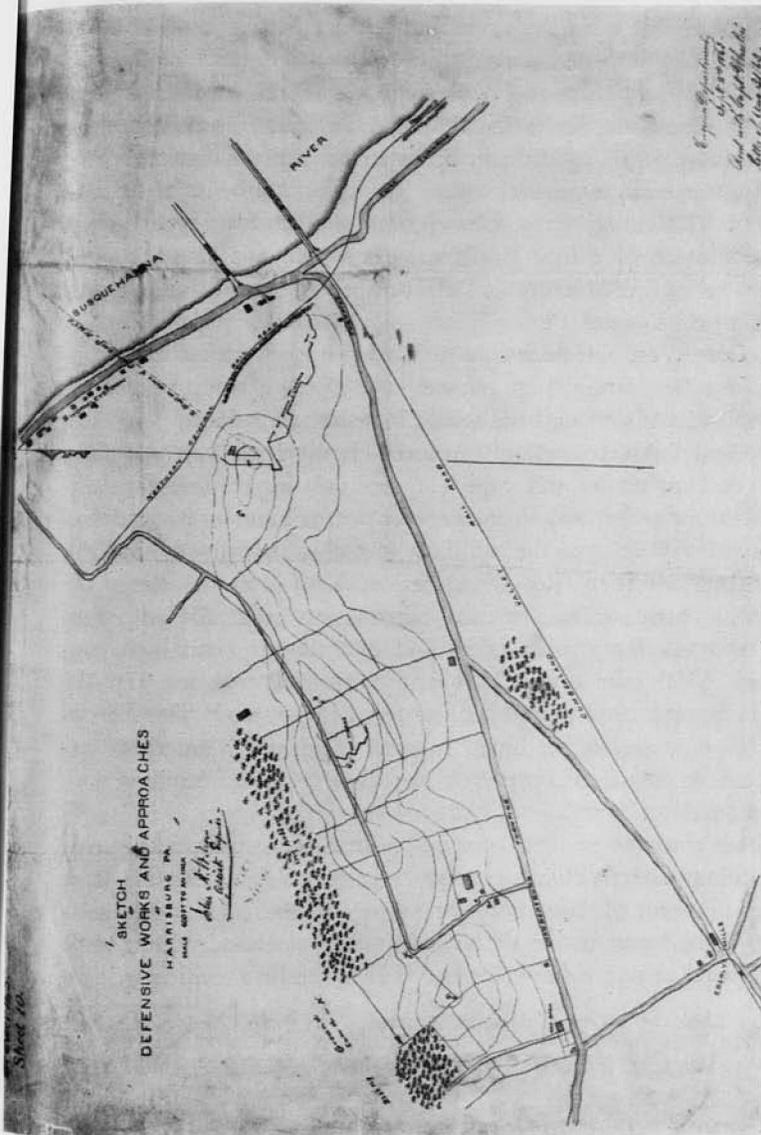
<sup>15</sup> Harrisburg *Daily Telegraph*, June 18, 1863.

<sup>16</sup> June 20, 1863.

<sup>17</sup> MS., Map of Proposed Defenses of Harrisburg, Pa., National Archives, Drawer 145, Sheet 11.

<sup>18</sup> New York *Herald*, June 27, 1863

<sup>19</sup> Harrisburg *Daily Telegraph*, June 30, 1863



1863 SKETCH OF THE DEFENSES OF HARRISBURG

A survey by Mr. Crist and Col. W. S. Nye has confirmed the accuracy of the plotting of the defenses on this sketch by the engineer of the Department of the Susquehanna.

survives in 1963. The survey filed in 1863 by Captain Wheeler showed a position with seven "jogs" in it, only two more than are plainly evident on the ground a century later.

A third position of some significance to the defense of Harrisburg was "Camp Russell," where modern Sixteenth Street ends at the Susquehanna River in New Cumberland. It was Wheeler's idea to fortify this location in order to protect the flank of Fort Washington from a possible attack from the south, or at least to delay it. Three regiments were posted at this road junction in rifle pits or other minor emplacements which are lost from the memory of old inhabitants and are untraceable upon the ground.

Not all of Central Pennsylvania supported the attempts at defense. One West Shore female ordered the axemen off her property when they arrived to remove trees.<sup>20</sup> A farmer near New Cumberland insisted that the whole invasion was simply "an election dodge of Andy Curtin."<sup>21</sup> Men in Harrisburg "loitered in the public thoroughfares and gaped at our passing columns. . . ."<sup>22</sup> The overt hostility and disinterest in performing military duties quite naturally enraged the militia who had come from New York at personal sacrifice. Realizing the depth of the ill-feeling, the *Telegraph* hastened to print an explanation: that the idle men were refugees from other areas and that the city had both contributed 2,500 men since 1861 and furnished 500 men in the present emergency who had been ordered elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> The *Patriot and Union*, under a headline "Lay on MacDuff," stated its explanation in terms of "we will not dignify such slanders with refutation. . . ."<sup>24</sup>

Epitomizing the civilian reaction to invasion was a man patriotically baptized William Henry Harrison Smith. As he later recalled the end of June, "I was sitting on the back porch half-asleep, when I was discovered to be in the rebels' hands. They said: 'Yank, what are you doing here?'"<sup>25</sup> Because he specifically iden-

<sup>20</sup> John Lockwood, *Our Campaign Around Gettysburg*, 23rd N.Y.S.N.G. (Brooklyn, 1864), 42.

<sup>21</sup> G. W. Wingate, *History of the 22nd Regiment N.Y.S.N.G.* (New York, 1901), 175.

<sup>22</sup> Lockwood, *Our Campaign*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Harrisburg *Daily Telegraph*, July 1, 1863.

<sup>24</sup> June 29, 1863.

<sup>25</sup> Narratives of Camp Hill Citizens Remembering the Civil War, 90. Written in shorthand in 1899 and 1900 during interviews with Addison Bowman, Esq., and transcribed by him and presented in typescript to Hamilton

tified the house as being on what has since been named Country Club Road, Camp Hill, the claim can be made that here was the farthest known point of penetration by uniformed, armed Confederates. A highwater mark was scratched one mile and three furlongs from Harrisburg, if that be significant, but the importance seems rather to be that a man named Smith slumbered unconcerned in the sun. Of course, while Smith snoozed, the capital of Pennsylvania was comfortably surrounded by 12,091 New York militia. But from Smith's standpoint the "defenders turned out to be our worst enemies,"<sup>26</sup> killing hogs, stealing, and marauding in general.

W. L. Gorgas, who lived on the West Shore where the Simpson Ferry Road met the Lisburn Road, remembered "houses were ransacked from top to bottom . . . not a single piece of furniture could be found; preserves and apple butter were used to decorate walls; doors were broken; chaff and feather beds opened and their contents thrown on the floor. . . ."<sup>27</sup>

Harrisburg merchants raised their prices to welcome the defenders. A tallow candle was sold for \$1, a cup of rye coffee for 15 cents and socks at 62 cents per pair. The *New York Times* suggested that the "rebels throw a sufficient number of shells into this city to make the inhabitants realize what was happening. . . ."<sup>28</sup> The *Harrisburg Patriot and Union* blasted that "certain local merchants would steal the trumpet from the Archangel Gabriel, if he turned his back."<sup>29</sup>

A final estimate of the pitch of patriotism in the capital might be inferred from the minute books of the Harrisburg Bridge Company nineteen days after Gettysburg: "The treasurer is instructed to make out a bill embracing every item and present them to the proper officer [of the government] for payment."<sup>30</sup> On January 4, 1864, the treasurer received \$3,028.63 from the general government, enough so that the usual dividend was doubled. War brought

Library, Carlisle, 1927, Cumberland County Historical Society. A second typescript is filed under "Casper Dull Papers" in Dauphin County Historical Society.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>28</sup> June 24, 1863.

<sup>29</sup> June 23, 1863.

<sup>30</sup> Record Group 12, Public Records Division, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

business to the rickety wooden bridge which two years before had been adjudged by Pleasonton's engineers "in poor order . . . not safe for the transit of heavy artillery."<sup>31</sup> Each civilian who crossed to the east to save his life paid his toll, as did each soldier who went west to offer his. Thus the weekly receipts grew from \$271.05 in the relatively normal week ending June 12 to \$1,180.40 in the week of June 26, 1863.

Dutifully paying their tolls to defend the bridge, long columns of uniformed men streamed into the forts at Bridgeport. First to arrive was Colonel W. B. Thomas' 20th Pennsylvania Emergency Regiment, but few other Pennsylvania units received assignments to the area, thus lending credence to the New Yorkers' belief that the local men were not defending their home state. The 26th Emergency, commanded by Colonel W. W. Jennings, of Harrisburg, fell wearily into Fort Washington just before the threat ended, but no other large units of Pennsylvania infantry figured in the defense of the immediate area. However, three small outfits deserve mention because they performed well: the "Henry Guard," the artillery battery of Captain Henry D. Landis, and a similar unit captained by Elihu Spencer Miller. The first was a section of Philadelphia policemen who gained the gratitude of the capital for their effectiveness while performing provost duty. The two batteries were peacetime dress and drill units composed of socially prominent Philadelphians, whom Couch gladly accepted.

Virtually all of the uniformed units were bands of hastily enrolled males with neither training as individual soldiers nor experience in working together as units. Their very clothing and equipment lessened their native effectiveness as men. As an example, they wore stiff, round-toed army shoes in which marching was difficult. In their own square-toed, broken-in civilian footgear they presumably would have moved less painfully.

In most instances militia officers were qualified only in that they had been able to persuade other civilians to enlist for thirty days, although some officers and men were discharged veterans of earlier terms of service. Captaincies were awarded for obtaining forty militiamen, lieutenantancies for twenty-five or fifteen, whether the officer could give a proper military order or not. The pay status

<sup>31</sup> Military Survey of the Susquehanna River.

of the militia was uncertain and their loyalty to Washington-appointed regular army officers somewhat questionable. However, seeing the tents of these bands of men from a distance, the Confederate reconnaissance paused, somewhat fearful of what the men in blue might be. At binocular range the camps on the hills over Bridgeport needed closer checking.

Most of the uniforms covered New York City militia, for the Empire State had responded handsomely to Lincoln. A mere two days after the call from the President the New Yorkers began chugging into the Harrisburg depot. For a fortnight the mobilization machinery in the New York armories cranked out men, including twenty regiments for Harrisburg and others subsequently re-routed to Baltimore, "that city being in danger and its successful defense being of more importance than Harrisburg."<sup>32</sup> Again, it needs to be stated that the men were not trained soldiers who had been sitting in garrisons awaiting orders. They were New York shopkeepers, clerks, and factory workers loosely organized into regiments and brigades who disembarked at Harrisburg and marched past the gaze of Pennsylvania shopkeepers, clerks, and factory hands. The generals had titles given them, to large extent, as rewards or honors. In Harrisburg the regular army officers generally chose to regroup the militia into new brigades and to ignore the ancient brigadiers, some of whom simply remained in New York doing administrative work rather than risk the draughts and strange duties of camp life.

First among the New York units to arrive were several with some individual training, as differentiated from unit training: the 8th Regiment (Washington Greys) of Colonel Joshua Varian; and the blue-uniformed and black-belted 71st Regiment, commanded by Colonel Benjamin L. Trafford. On June 17 the 11th New York, a dismounted artillery unit, debarked at Harrisburg together with the 22nd Regiment of Colonel Lloyd C. Aspinwall, and the 23rd of Brooklyn under Colonel William Everdell. Their first cross-river billet was the ring of half-dug trenches soon to be named "Fort Washington." The men complained forcefully when they learned that they would be pressed into digging duty. With the arrival of the 37th New York of Colonel Charles Roome

<sup>32</sup> Emmons Clark, *History of the 2nd Company of the 7th Regiment New York State Militia* (New York, 1864), 380.

on the 19th of June and the 56th New York under Lieutenant Colonel John Quincy Adams on the 20th, the principal units in the subsequent skirmishing had taken positions on the "south side" of the river, as the New Yorkers termed the land west of the Susquehanna.

Couch placed first priority on manning the principal defense, Fort Washington, but with the arrival of later units he ordered the 8th and 71st down the Cumberland Valley on railroad cars. Their mission, under the initial command of Colonel Varian and later under Brigadier General Joseph Farmer Knipe, was to make contact with the approaching enemy and to serve as a screen between it and the men working on the forts.

When additional forces arrived, Brigadier General W. F. "Baldy" Smith, who became "Commander West of the Susquehanna," brigaded the 11th, 22nd, and 37th together and sent them to occupy the Camp Russell site near New Cumberland, a location which the regiments variously termed "Camp Taylor" and "Camp Cox" according to the 22nd N.Y.S.N.G. historian. Brigadier General John Ewen, commissioned in 1847, was given command.

Before General Smith, a regular army officer, could take command, Couch had given Fort Washington to another New York brigadier, William Hall. According to Hall's report, he quickly deployed the men to the west of the forts in a picket line which he described as "making a crescent of fifteen miles."<sup>33</sup> As did most of the inexperienced officers in a territory strange to them, he misjudged distance. The line probably extended about three miles: from the north end of modern 21st Street, Camp Hill, where it nearly intersects the Conodoguinet Creek, south through White Hill and along the Lisburn Road toward the Yellow Breeches Creek—the width of the old Proprietary Manor of Lowther. To the west of this infantry picket line roved various militia cavalry troops and then Knipe's skittery screening force. So much for the defenders of Pennsylvania.

Now there must be a look at the invaders. R. S. Ewell's Corps, until recently Stonewall Jackson's, romped ahead as the advance echelon, partly because Ewell personally knew the area from his

<sup>33</sup> *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1880-1901), Series I, Vol. XXVII, 220 ff.

previous experience of duty at Carlisle Barracks and his civilian work for the Columbia Railroad. His mission was to take Harrisburg. The forward element for Ewell, in turn, was the cavalry brigade commanded by a Jefferson College alumnus, Brigadier General Albert Gallatin Jenkins, who entered Pennsylvania on the 15th of June and pushed sixteen miles to Chambersburg by 11 p.m. before dropping south ten miles again on the 17th. On the 22nd he proceeded north through Greencastle a second time, tangling with Boyd's First New York Cavalry. In the fray outside Greencastle a corporal, William F. Rihl, was killed—the first casualty of the invasion. By the 23rd, Jenkins was marching into Chambersburg (playing *Bonnie Blue Flag*), by the 24th he was in Shippensburg, and by 10 a.m. on the 27th in Carlisle, eighteen miles from the capital city. His mission was to find the best approach routes so that Ewell could expeditiously capture it.

As he rode slowly up the Valley from Greencastle commandeering horses, food, and clothing, Jenkins for nine days and fifty-two miles contended with Knipe's New York regiments, their battery of Miller's Artillery, and an elusive troop of cavalry combining both Boyd's unit and the so-called "Stanwood Regulars," a force of regular army recruits who had enlisted at Carlisle Barracks in June but had not received training as yet. To their credit this motley collection of recruits and militia, fresh from desks and dairies, retained a semblance of order and cohesion most of the distance from Chambersburg east as they withdrew the length of the Valley. Never did the professional corps overwhelm the amateur brigade while Knipe could withdraw, but by June 28 there was no maneuver room to his rear: the screen pressed against the door at Oyster Point, 3,000 yards from Fort Couch.

When the 28th, the Lord's Day, began, old devil Jenkins lay in bivouac near Hickorytown, halfway between Carlisle and Mechanicsburg, thirteen miles from the Susquehanna. As was his practice in announcing his arrival, Jenkins sent forward a piece of artillery from the Maryland Battery of Captain W. Harter Griffin. Here was a force calculated to impress a wary citizenry. Two years in the field, it appeared to be a band of ruffians. Within the last two weeks it had newly outfitted itself with Parrott guns captured from the Federal forces at Winchester. Coming into

Mechanicsburg Griffin fired a round, presumably a high explosive, eight-pound projectile.

Having been properly heralded, Jenkins sent a patrol into the borough, its head shadowed by a flag of truce, possibly flying from the Griffin flagstaff which bore a Pennsylvania Bucktail captured many battles before. After exchanging a handshake with cavalrman Frank Murray, of the Curtin Guards, whose unit had brushed with him during the previous night, Jenkins announced his willingness to buy 1,500 rations with Confederate scrip. Burgess George Hummel protested how difficult it might be on a Sunday morning to collect so much food in so small a town. As a former Congressman, no amateur at debate, Jenkins suggested as an alternative that his two regiments hunt for the provisions themselves. Mechanicsburg complied quickly.

Seven miles to the east, meanwhile, in the forts, "the chaplain passed along the lines bidding men to rely on strength from above and commending us with words of Christian cheer to the Divine protection."<sup>34</sup>

Needing that protection were the raw troops, men and boys, many aware of their plight. Wrote one: "[Our] defenses appeared wretchedly inadequate. . . ." <sup>35</sup> Another observed: "The ramparts were constructed of a soil, made of equal parts of loam and fragments of rocks . . . [which] would have been more destructive than volleys of musketry—a shell bursting on any part would have converted hundreds of them into grape and cannister and might have disabled an entire gun detachment and its infantry supports."<sup>36</sup>

Back at the Ashland House (now the American House near the C.V.R.R. Depot), Jenkins rose from his dinner table, thanked the innkeeper, Henry Irvine, and rode east with the 16th Cavalry Regiment under Colonel James Cochran and with Captain Thomas Jackson's Battery. Meanwhile, the 14th Virginia Cavalry under Colonel M. J. Ferguson had trotted out of Mechanicsburg headed north, accompanied by the Griffin Battery. This half of Jenkins's force wheeled right when it encountered the Chambersburg and Harrisburg Turnpike and proceeded east a short distance. When

<sup>34</sup> Lockwood, *Our Campaign*, 49.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>36</sup> A. J. Pleasonton, *3rd Annual Report for 1863* (Philadelphia, 1864), 86.

it arrived at Salem Church it was able to nip at Knipe for a last time. Captain Miller, of the defending artillery unit, wrote: "Next morning [after sleeping the night of the 27th at their guns near Oyster Point] we again advanced . . . , and our line was formed on Sporting Hill, where for the first time, the enemy's guns opened on us from so great a distance, however they produced no effect."<sup>37</sup> Tradition in the Eberly family, which lived just west of Sporting Hill in 1863, places a Union gun at their own farmhouse. The same family account places a Confederate artillery piece at Salem Church, just over one mile to the west. This tradition fits the circumstances of Miller's report, and the distance was approximately the extreme range of artillery pieces such as those the contending forces had with them.

Miller, together with four companies of the 71st Infantry which were accompanying him, retired to the east. The Griffin Battery followed, clattering down the Turnpike for three miles until it reached the Albright farmhouse still standing at 36th Street. Near here was a roadblock put in place by the defenders, so that the Griffin artillery would have swung north to flank it and would have taken cover near the stone farm buildings. At least two civilian survivors, Martin Brinton and William Sadler, remembered the return of Knipe's men and the firing of artillery from the 36th Street farmhouse.<sup>38</sup>

Jenkins with the rest of the command proceeded east on two other roads which led out of Mechanicsburg. The extent of the penetration made by the units on the Simpson Ferry Road has not been recorded. However, the unit on Trindle Springs Road can be followed. A lieutenant of the 16th Virginia recorded that the command rode until it came to "a dominating hill about four miles distant from Harrisburg."<sup>39</sup> Here Griffin unlimbered and fired artillery shells into several suspicious looking areas, including the woods on his flank near Shiremanstown, from which he flushed some persons. The "dominating hill," from several accounts in the Bowman Narratives, was that rise surmounted by Peace Church, 1.4 miles west of Oyster Point.

After thus announcing themselves, both regiments of the Jenkins

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>38</sup> Bowman Narratives, 20, 76.

<sup>39</sup> *Southern Historical Society Papers*, XXIV (1896), 343.

Brigade broke off any connections with the defenders and retired west for the night. The 16th Virginia spread out over the Neidig Farm to the east of Mechanicsburg on the Trindle Road, General Jenkins moved into the unoccupied house of John Rupp, and the 14th Regiment probably bedded down at either Silver's Spring or near some other source of water.

When darkness descended on June 28 tension was at its highest in both military camps. But the civilian population must have been somewhat more relaxed. Some of the Southern boys were found to be homesick. Most were soft-spoken and polite. A few seemed to realize what little chance they had of returning to their homes whole and hale, according to the recollection of Carlisle citizens who mixed with them.

Jenkins's men by no means were just fun-loving choir boys, but they relaxed in their war-making. Riding east they overtook a farmer rushing to save his herd. Nicking him "*a tergo et posteriore*" with bayonet, they enjoyed it immensely.<sup>40</sup> County Sheriff Thomas Rippey fell into their hands, but they released him—except for his hat. Riding out of one Valley town a trooper saw the humor in a comrade's thin but spreading moustache: "Take them mice out of your mouth. I see their tails sticking out!"<sup>41</sup> Retreating a few days later they liberated some home brew and arrived in Carlisle roaring drunk.

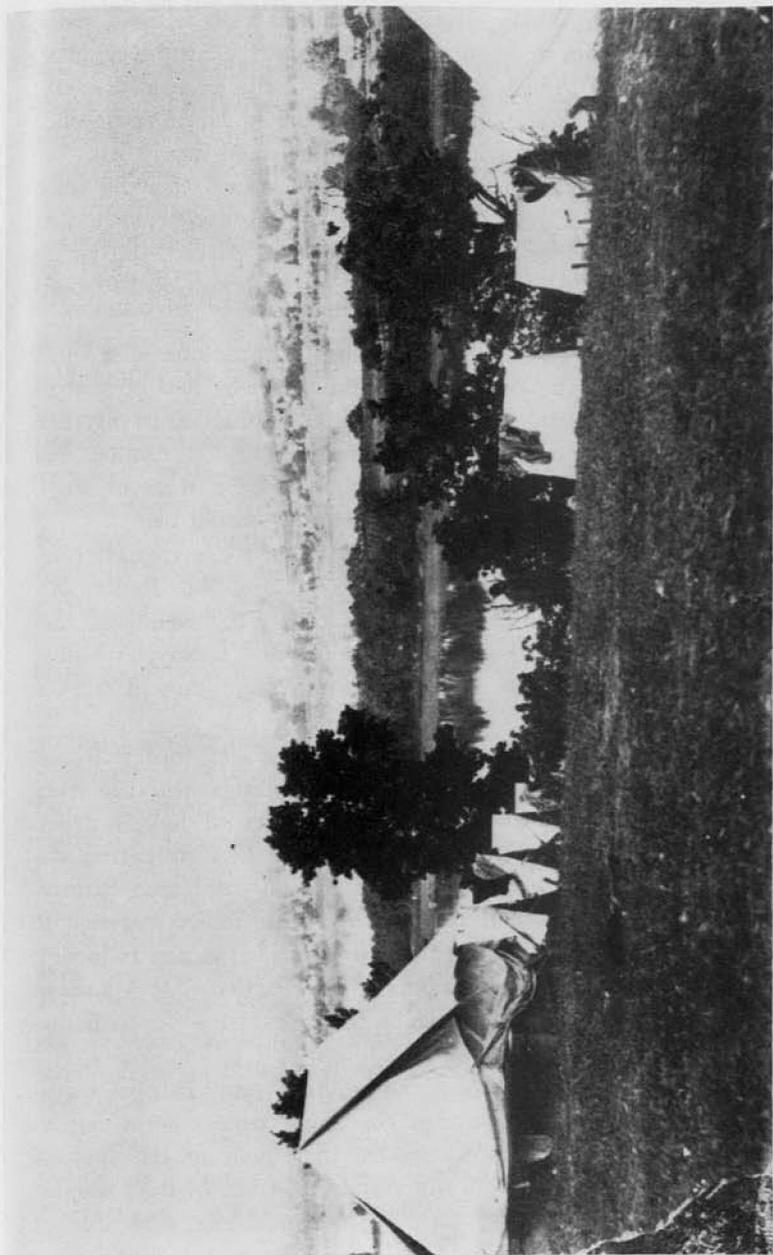
Back in Harrisburg, however, the civilian population fed itself on ever wilder rumors. Spies were rumored everywhere. A crossing of Confederates was reported at Middletown, and a battle at Marysville,<sup>42</sup> but later denied. Firing had been heard at midday, but no one touched off the inflammable materials that had been quietly assembled at the end of the wooden Camel Back Bridge, even though the night sky was filled with the glow of the burning bridge at Wrightsville in the south.

In Fort Washington the 23rd Brooklyn posted double sentries on the 28th. The 71st, still rubbing its feet from the long mission down the Valley with Knipe, put six companies out in rifle pits beyond the forts. Engineer John Wilson threw himself into a

<sup>40</sup> Harrisburg *Patriot & Union*, June 29, 1863 (which added the advice, "Give up cows unless ironclad").

<sup>41</sup> W. W. Goldsborough, *The Maryland Line in the C.S.A.* (Baltimore, 1869), 312.

<sup>42</sup> New York *Herald*, June 30, 1863.



*The Susquehanna and Harrisburg from Fort Washington, 1863. The large island is the one directly opposite downtown Harrisburg. The white bulk on the right is the old Capitol.*

shelter, but the 26th Pennsylvania lay in the rain without tents. Wholly exhausted on the night of the 28th was the 32nd Regiment, the City Greys of Philadelphia, who had finally been sworn into service that day. Elements had been loitering in Harrisburg since June 16, bargaining first with General Couch and finally with the governor himself on the terms of enlistment. After receiving from Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton an express promise that they could go home when the emergency had passed, the Greys raised their hands in enlistment oaths. Their tiring job had been felling trees in front of Fort Washington.

Outside the fort and below the bluff, Dr. Malone sharpened his scalpel in the 11th Brigade Hospital which he had opened in the brick tavern in Bridgeport. Over his head brooded twenty-five artillery pieces, including thirteen three-inch rifled cannon and some obsolete navy howitzers which the militia had never fired. The defenders were as prepared as ever they would be.

In the blackness beyond the Union pickets there was stirring. Into it were ordered units of the 23rd, 52nd, and 56th Regiments, who moved stealthily, insisting later that they had ventured vast distances into the darkness without finding any enemy. Actually, they could not have gone far, for Jenkins slept only 2.6 miles from Oyster Point.

On the 28th, units from the 22nd Regiment were ordered back from Camp Russell to barricade several buildings near the river bridges with "beams, barrels of earth, bundles of lath, railroad sleepers and sandbags."<sup>43</sup> By 10 p.m. they had converted the C.V.R.R. engine house into a loop-holed and casemated battery. At the same hour the 22nd and 37th were cautiously marched to the front lines. In the darkness they formed a battle line following whispered commands. Seeing nothing, they returned at 4 a.m. to bivouac along the N.C.R.R. tracks on the edge of the Susquehanna River.

While insects sang, sentries paced nervously, and refugee farmers stirred sleeplessly in strange city beds, orders went out to high military commanders who were then holding the fate of Harrisburg in their hands. In Maryland the Army of the Potomac welcomed a new commander, George Gordon Meade, who ordered

<sup>43</sup> Wingate, *22nd Regiment N.Y.S.N.G.*, 180.

the army to the north. In Chambersburg the Army of Northern Virginia received new intelligence in the headquarters of R. E. Lee. At 7:30 a.m., June 29, he ordered the Southern army to the south. But, at 10 o'clock the night before, Lee had already ordered Ewell to move directly on Harrisburg.

To appreciate fully the events of the 29th it is necessary to try to drop behind the official accounts and into the mind of General Jenkins, a man with the mission of finding a route for Ewell into Harrisburg and a commander who apparently never filed a report of his part in the invasion. Certain guesswork is thus necessary to supplement the official records, which would suggest that all activity was confined to a narrow belt of land lying close to the old turnpike. Both common sense and less formal evidence than the official reports demand a different conclusion. A veteran reconnaissance unit such as Jenkins's, particularly one accompanied by two staff officers from Ewell's headquarters, would have fanned out far to the north and south of the center-Valley roads. Tenuous evidence confirms that this was done. Confederate bands, traversing Sterrett's Gap, ranged east along the north side of Blue Mountain and appeared near Duncannon and Marysville, if we are to believe tales which reached newspaper pages.<sup>44</sup> West Shore tradition includes stories of a spy in female disguise, of a one-armed spy, and of roaming bands of Confederates stealing horses as close to the river as a farmhouse on modern Twelfth Street, within pistol range of Fort Couch. The *Telegraph* on two days reported the capture of spies on the river itself. All of these accounts point to the logical conclusion that Jenkins performed in a manner to be expected of a competent reconnaissance commander. He spread some of his force out in small parties which ranged over a wide area examining the bridges, the condition of the river banks at fords, the nature of the bottom of streams, the depth of the water, etc. With a map of Cumberland County in his possession Jenkins would have had little trouble directing scouts out over various routes.

Official reports of the action on June 29 are sketchy. General Smith, field commander for Couch, speaks only of sending out Stanwood's Cavalry, who "engaged and drove in the pickets of

<sup>44</sup> Harrisburg *Morning Telegraph*, June 29, 1863.

the enemy on the Carlisle Road before being forced to retire because of artillery fire."<sup>45</sup> This passing reference to artillery fire suggests Jenkins's tactic for the 29th. He threatened with his left while probing deep with his right. The threat was a noisy distraction at Oyster Point. The probe was a swift, silent ride to the south into high ground southwest of New Cumberland, which got no mention in Smith's record.

Lieutenant Herman Schuricht, part of the probing arm, told his diary: "In the morning I received orders to meet General Jenkins and act as his escort. We reconnoitered to the right of the Harrisburg Turnpike, charged on the enemy's outposts, and viewed the city of Harrisburg and its defenses. This was the farthest advance made by any Confederate troops during the campaign."<sup>46</sup>

Neither the regimental histories nor the newspaper reports mention the "charge on the enemy's outposts," but several civilian eyewitnesses survived to tell what must have been the return of the probe. William Sadler mentioned that "rebels had a line at Slate Hill,"<sup>47</sup> and W. L. Gorgas remembered a body of Confederate cavalry "to the number of about sixty"<sup>48</sup> appeared on the Lisburn Road. The information gleaned in the ride was rushed back to Ewell in Carlisle by mid-afternoon.

While Jenkins sneaked his quiet look from the hills southwest of New Cumberland, the left was demonstrating loudly. The *Herald* reported thirty shells fired. The 71st Regimental record said that the shelling lasted for two hours.<sup>49</sup> The guns were fired from several vantage points into several locations. W. H. H. Smith saw artillery at Orr's Bridge, 1.3 miles west of Oyster Point, but others remembered it firing from 36th Street, .8 mile west of the Point, and others saw it round the Point itself.<sup>50</sup> With the artillery advance which must have occurred came also the Virginia battalion commanded by Lieutenant Colonel V. A. Witcher. In several hours of noisy work they fought as far as Oyster Point, at least, and more likely to a position 200 yards

<sup>45</sup> *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XXVII, 220.

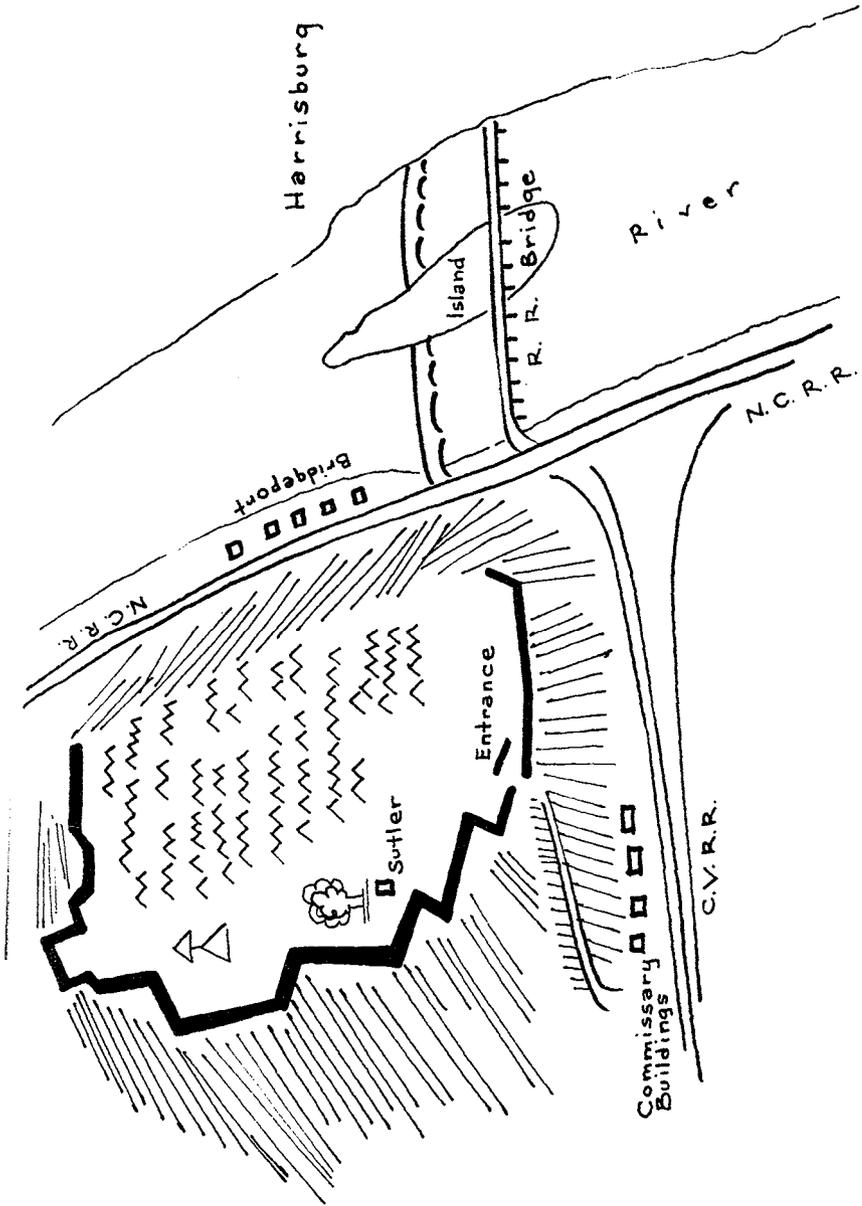
<sup>46</sup> *Southern Historical Society Papers*, Vol. XXIV, 343.

<sup>47</sup> Bowman, *Narratives*, 75.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Henry Whittemore, *History of the 71st Regiment N.Y.S.N.G.* (New York, 1886), 260.

<sup>50</sup> Bowman *Narratives*, 41, 88, 93.



PLAN OF FORT WASHINGTON

*A re-drawing of a pencil sketch made by Henry Wirt Shower on a letter to his family written from the fort in 1863. Original in the possession of F. S. Klem, Lancaster, and reproduced by his permission.*



### OYSTER'S TAVERN

*This tavern is the site of the highwater skirmishing on June 29, 1863, near the junction of the Carlisle Pike and Trindle Spring Road, within the modern boundaries of Camp Hill. In the front yard the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission will place a commemorative marker in observance of the Gettysburg campaign centennial.*

*Ink drawing by the late Miss Dorothy Kendall.*

east of it. Here ran the north-south Lime Kiln Road, then fenced, which would have provided proper cover for dismounted cavalrymen. Here, at modern 28th Street, sat the Turnpike Tollhouse, an appropriate goal for an infantry advance of the character of that made June 29, 1863.

At the beginning of the day the defenders probably had stretched their picket line along Lime Kiln Road and had planted artillery near the Tollhouse, judging from the place a westward-winged shell struck Oyster Point Tavern.

In command was Lieutenant Colonel John Elwell, of the 22nd New York, who had been ordered forward by Knipe to relieve Hall as commander of the picket force. With 150 volunteers he proceeded to "Oyster Point Station" and stationed fifty men from the 8th Regiment "due north and across the fields and beyond to the railroad."<sup>51</sup> He must have meant south, since there was no railroad to the north. He then "established in a like manner a portion of the 23rd Regiment from the Carlisle Road due south

<sup>51</sup> Lockwood, *Our Campaign*, 57.

[meaning north] keeping the remaining company [from the 56th Regiment] as reserve." En route to the position he had heard cannonading at five or ten minute intervals.

After firing began on his front Elwell left his command post and "advanced over a cornfield to a small wood situated on more elevated ground . . . the skirmishers advanced about the distance of a mile. . . ."

The account is not precise enough to pinpoint the action, but topography suggests that the result of the action on the 29th was for the Union force to retire to more defensible positions on the ridge of land which is modern 21st Street. Here ran the next north-south road. Here the following day the 26th Pennsylvania camped,<sup>52</sup> giving rise to one of the theories for the origin of the name "Camp Hill."

When Elwell was safely back on his ridge, he received reinforcements from the 11th Regiment and then perhaps moved west again when the Confederates had concluded their feint. At 4 p.m. the Witcher Battalion fell back, enough time having elapsed for the probe on the right to have been completed. The brigade then retired to bivouac positions used previously.

In the skirmish a Jenkins soldier was wounded, captured, and treated by Dr. John D. Bowman in his grandfather's barn at 24th and Market Streets, Camp Hill, showing that the defenders had advanced west from 21st Street again. A soldier of the 71st New York was wounded in the thigh. Blood thus had been drawn on both sides, the defenses assessed, and the stage set for action. In the forts: "As the sun goes down in the West, it leaves within the fort and within and around Harrisburg an anxious, wondering, guessing, partly fearful and somewhat excited population. . . . We expect a fight tomorrow, more or less general or serious in its character."<sup>53</sup>

Data on the events of the 30th of June are scarcer than those for the two days preceding. Most of the civilian population by this time had fled. Journalists were hampered by censorship and

<sup>52</sup> MS. Diaries of Henry Wirt Shriver, in possession of F. S. Klein, Lancaster.

<sup>53</sup> New York *Herald*, June 30, 1863.

their stories delayed. When they finally filed the news, they naturally wrote about the more dramatic events in Adams County.<sup>54</sup>

When the last day of the month dawned Jenkins had been lying for a full twenty-four hours at the mouth of the Cumberland Valley while the rest of Ewell's Corps was withdrawing. One student of the Gettysburg campaign and author of an account now in preparation, Colonel W. S. Nye of Wormleysburg, believes that Ewell simply forgot Jenkins. He argues that: (1) the cavalry brigade was not left as a decoy because it was lying concealed; and (2) the cavalry would have been more useful in the front of the corps.<sup>55</sup>

In the forts above Bridgeport no news circulated about an enemy withdrawal, although Ben Huber, of Chambersburg, had made a fast dash via Perry County from Chambersburg to tell General Couch that he believed that Lee was heading south.<sup>56</sup> Couch apparently passed the news along to Washington but did not relax the vigil in his department. Thus, at 10 a.m. on the 30th of June the 22nd and 37th New York Regiments were ordered to proceed north from Camp Russell for the front. When they arrived at division headquarters near the bridges, they turned west and marched slowly toward Oyster Point in the company of their commander, General Ewen. Unencumbered with equipment and carrying only three crackers per man, they anticipated an early return to their squad mess. The 22nd noticed barns which they termed "magnificent" and said that "the deserted homes and pillaged farms . . . provided temptation for the hungry and badly-supplied men to help themselves."<sup>57</sup> Interestingly enough, the enemy from the South had never visited the territory through which they passed, so that the pillaging must have been the work of their fellow New Yorkers. The 22nd Regiment historian insisted that their men refrained from misdeeds themselves, but that the 37th "stole quilts of the most variegated pattern . . . presenting a most unmilitary appearance." The civilians confirmed that it was

<sup>54</sup> The Lancaster *Express*, wryly bearing the censorship, observed on June 26: "Notwithstanding that General Couch has appointed Lt. Col. *Coppee* to furnish *copy*, we are without news today."

<sup>55</sup> Paper presented at the Third Annual Gettysburg Conference, Gettysburg College, July, 1962.

<sup>56</sup> Jacob Hoke, *The Great Invasion of 1863* (Dayton, 1887), pp. 164-167.

<sup>57</sup> Wingate, *22nd Regiment N.Y.S.N.G.*, 186.

a mixed pattern of behavior, that some regiments behaved well, and that the "Dutch" regiment (the 71st N.Y.S.N.G.) was the miscreant.

Arriving at Oyster Point the troops could find nothing of the enemy, nor any rations. General W. F. Smith, who with Scott, Wilson, and his staff had ridden out to observe, ordered Stanwood's Cavalry forward, but he could find nothing but farmers who stated that the Confederates had gone west. Smith and Ewen, staff and hungry regiment, then counter-marched east toward food. When they had gone about one mile and had arrived approximately at modern Seventeenth Street, Camp Hill, Stanwood thundered up to their rear with the exciting news that he had found Jenkins. Ewen then wheeled them around and rushed the units off for Sporting Hill, scene of an artillery exchange two days previous.

Here occurred the action which enters the *Official Records* as "Skirmish at Sporting Hill," where twenty casualties were counted. In this action, a draw, Jenkins's rear guard stood its ground but proceeded west after Ewen's men broke off the fight late in the day and returned to Oyster Point.

Thus, as June ended Harrisburg was safe, even though its western suburbs were shaken and its fort-defenses still a chimera. From the city, paying their bridge tolls, young women soon came on inspection tours, to tease young Private Samuel Pennypacker as he stood guard at the wooden gate on the ramp into Fort Washington. Across the bridge, too, trudged old Polly Oyster to wield her broom in her littered tavern, Tommy Oyster to plug the hole made by the Parrott in his wood shed, and W. H. H. Smith to sit again in the sun. Because Meade had moved north and Lee south, General Ewell and 30,000 men never tested the 12,000 men defending Harrisburg. Because the hills at Bridgeport teemed with men, Jenkins paused for a closer look. The forward splash of the invasion soon evaporated in the summer sun. Only footnote and legend record the mark, the highwater mark of 1863.