ANYONE who has had contact with the record and life of John F. Hartranft is amazed that he is not held in greater public honor and esteem in the state to which he contributed so much. The answer lies in several directions, including his death at the age of fifty-nine and his great personal modesty.

In the short space of time this morning we shall be unable to describe the public service of a man who was twice Auditor-General, twice Governor, and whose development of the Pennsylvania National Guard refined it, strengthened it and made it a true military arm, and whose plans for it are reflected in present-day practice; a man whose political opponents were so respectful of his integrity and ability that they did not attack him even in the public prints which were notorious for such attacks. We must, however, for clarity and understanding, say something of his background.

Hartranft was born near Fagleysville, New Hanover Township, Montgomery County, on December 16, 1830, the only child of Samuel E. and Lydia Bucher Hartranft. He lived in this very rural setting and in Boyertown as a small boy. The family moved to Norristown in 1844 when Hartranft's father purchased "The Pennsylvania Farmer," an inn which he enlarged, improved, and operated for eight years. The father had previously owned a similar, but smaller, place on the site of what is now the Boyertown Hotel. In addition to the Pennsylvania Farmer, Hartranft's father owned and ran a stage line which was continued until 1873. Besides this...

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*Dr. Barrett, of the Board of Education of Philadelphia, read this paper at the Association's annual meeting at Gettysburg, October 12, 1963.

1 George W. Roth, History of the Falkner Swamp Reformed Church, pp. 19 ff.
2 S. K. Brecht, The Genealogical Record of the Schwenkfelder Families... (New York: Rand-McNally, 1923), I, 9, Item 49-76.
3 Deed Book 64, Page 454, Montgomery County.
4 Deed Book 47, Page 479, Berks County.
he also bred, sold, and traded horses, a line for which father and son became known at some distance because of the high quality of their animals. Many officers of the Union army procured their mounts from Hartranft for this reason.6

It is easy to imagine the exciting days of a boy and young man with these activities in his family. As a result of his participation in the family horse business, too, there developed in John Hartranft a maturity and dependability that is referred to in his father’s reliance on him and also in the attitude of the townsfolk toward him.7

Hartranft’s education was by no means neglected. He first had his father,8 then tutors,9 then the Treemount Seminary in Norristown10 and Marshall College at Mercersburg.11 After one year at Marshall, Hartranft entered Union College at Schenectady, New York, for engineering studies. He graduated in 1853 after a record so outstanding that of thirty-three grades on his record, the lowest was 96, and only eleven are lower than 100.12

Engineering was not to be his life’s work, however. He was employed, by special permission of the college trustees, three months before the rest of his class graduated, and spent the year as a rodman in railroad construction.13 He felt, though, that Norristown offered opportunities and associations that fitted him better and resumed the close partnership with his father in his many activities there. In January of 1854 he married Sallie Douglas Sebring, of Easton.14

Hartranft was extremely energetic. He was a deputy sheriff for four years,15 dealt in real estate even in his twenties,16 was a member of the Norristown town council17 and also elected to the

6 Letters to J. F. H. from “Turf, Field and Farm,” November 13, 1876; from Jennie Cameron, September 25, 1866, Stockham Collection.
7 Tax Assessor’s Records, Montgomery County, 1850-1874.
8 Schwenkville Weekly Item, April 30, 1880. Clipping, Scrapbook, p. 136, Stockham Collection.
9 “The Transcript” (Clippings in the Montgomery County Historical Society, Scrapbook A, Shelf 7), August 17, 1897.
10 Treemount Seminary Catalogue, 1848.
11 Records of Marshall College.
12 Records of Union College, Schenectady, New York.
14 Norristown Herald and Free Press, February 1, 1854.
15 Norristown Register and Democrat, January 5, 1858.
16 Deed Book 91, p. 54, Montgomery County.
17 Norristown Register and Democrat, March 23, 1858.
school board before he reached thirty. In addition he was a member and then president of the Montgomery Hose and Steam Fire Engine Company. He was very active in his father's businesses as well as being a lieutenant in a local militia company called the Norris Rifles. In 1857 he was elected lieutenant colonel in the state militia and two years later made colonel. The officers were elected in those days, and this election is a good indication of the high regard in which his fellow townsmen held him.

Lincoln's call for volunteers sounded on April 15, 1861, and the colonel of the First Regiment of Montgomery County Militia hastened to Harrisburg to offer the services of his unit in his government's time of need. Being assured of acceptance, he returned and made ready for leaving home with his officers and men. By the 19th of April, the regiment was on its way to Harrisburg, being retitled the "Fourth Pennsylvania Volunteers" the following day. The men were anxious to reach Washington as quickly as possible in order to participate in the battles then thought imminent. It was delay they met, however, instead of the enemy. The lads who marched away so lightheartedly to defend their country were to plod homeward three months later weary with work and tired of the seamy side of conflict, without ever having engaged their opponents in anything more than a brush. Deaf to the pleadings and promises of everyone, including Secretary of War Simon Cameron himself, they accepted the end of their term of enlistment.

Their muster-out order came on July 20, when they had only the rumors about an impending battle that had been rife for months. But coincidence conspired to darken the memory of this eager group of brave men. On the next day the battle of Bull Run was fought, and the Fourth Regiment, although most of its members volunteered again and for a longer term, was branded

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18 Norristown Public School Records, 1860.
19 Minute Book, June 1, 1858, August 2, 1861, Montgomery Hose (etc.) Co.
20 Norristown Register and Democrat, October 27, 1857.
22 Norristown Register and Watchman, June 18, 1861.
23 Ibid., July 16, 1861.
25 Ibid.
with a stigma difficult to erase. The stain, although undeserved by all, touched Hartranft along with the others, and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton was quoted as saying, whenever Hartranft came before him: "Why, this is the Colonel of the 4th Penna. Regiment that refused to go into service at First Bull Run."28

Hartranft, however, withdrew from the regiment when it determined to accept its musters-out. He volunteered to take part in the nearing battle and was assigned to a staff position by the same orders that sent away his regiment. He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his action at First Bull Run, but that award came twenty-five years later and could not have helped him in his rise as a soldier. The action of his regiment, however, delayed that rise considerably.30

After Bull Run, Hartranft returned to Norristown to raise another regiment for a three-year enlistment. He succeeded without undue delay because of his personal reputation for heroism and because of his well-known solicitude for the welfare and safety of his men.31

The new regiment was designated the 51st Pennsylvania Volunteers, and in keeping with the spirit of volunteers, their colonel asked for an assignment promising action. Fearing that his command would again receive discouraging treatment, he had his former brigade commander intercede for him with General Ambrose E. Burnside and succeeded in being included in the expedition then being organized by Burnside.32

The Burnside expedition embarked and sailed down the coast to Hatteras Inlet, just below Cape Hatteras. The wintry storms were tempests in January of 1862, and mountainous seas sank four of the vessels before the expedition was able to reach the waters of the Sound. Landings were finally made on Roanoke Island, where Hartranft fought his first battle as a commander of men.

27 Harrisburg Patriot and Union, cited in the Register and Watchman, August 6, 1861.
30 Philadelphia Press, October 19, 1889.
31 Norristown Register and Watchman, August 27, October 29, 1861.
32 Letter, W. B. Franklin to A. E. Burnside, November 11, 1861, Stockham Collection.
on February 7, 1862. Roanoke was won, and then occurred a sharper struggle for New Bern, North Carolina. Hartranft missed the next battle, that of Camden, North Carolina; he was allowed to return home because of the serious illness, resulting in death, of two of his children, Adda and Wilson, within a week of each other. After this personal blow, Hartranft returned to his command.

The 51st was assigned next to John Pope's Army of Virginia. With Pope, Hartranft and the regiment participated in Second Bull Run and Chantilly. After George B. McClellan's return to command, it fought at South Mountain and Antietam. At Antietam, Hartranft was called upon for a display of heroism and gallantry in a setting almost like that of a stage, with the opposing armies for an audience. The right of the Union army had been fighting heavily. The south stone bridge across Antietam Creek, on the left of the army, still had to be taken. Burnside's command was in position and had received the order to advance. The bridge and its approaches were raked by a withering fire from the Confederate lines above and beyond it. On the Union side there was little cover for the force of men necessary to take an objective like this.

The order to advance was first given to another brigade in Burnside's corps, but after an heroic attempt, this brigade was forced back to its lines. Burnside then directed General Samuel D. Sturgis, commanding the Second Division, "to detail the Fifty-First Pennsylvania (Colonel Hartranft) and the Fifty-First New York (Colonel Potter) to assault the bridge and carry it at all hazards." Burnside knew his men and their commanders. He knew Hartranft from Roanoke Island and New Bern. He knew him from Bull Run and from Chantilly, and he knew the caliber and temper of the men Hartranft had forged into a fighting machine.

Burnside later reported that he "directed the batteries on the left to fire on the woods above the bridge" where the enemy was entrenched in "pits and behind barricades within easy musket range..."
Then came the order to charge. Across the open spaces separating the Union forces and the bridge swept the twin regiments, with the 51st Pennsylvania following their colonel into a furnace of gunfire. The tempo of musketry increased as they approached the stone bridge, which offered almost no protection because of its simple design. With comrades falling all around, their second in command dying, they paused for just a moment and then, gathering themselves, hurtled across the bridge into the teeth of the Confederate guns.\(^9\)

When at last they had gained the solid ground across Antietam Creek, followed by their twin regiment, the New York 51st, the 51st Pennsylvania had made for themselves a place in their country's history.\(^40\) The name of the 51st and that of its commander can be found on the bridge today, placed there to commemorate the heroism of a gallant regiment and its gallant leader, who carried out the orders of his commander and led his men to victory in a truly appalling situation.\(^41\) Hartranft's leadership at Burnside's Bridge was instrumental in winning him a recommendation for promotion to the rank of brigadier general.\(^42\)

But Hartranft was not a man to whom honors came easily in war; he had to earn them over and over again. While he held positions of command above his rank of colonel during the rest of the war, he was not to wear a general's star until after May 12, 1864, and only then after he had proven again and again that he was eminently fitted for the responsibilities of that grade.\(^43\)

Just a year and a half before, Hartranft had been a private citizen, the leader of a militia regiment in a loosely organized state guard. He entered the military life as colonel at a time when all was confusion. But events showed that there was no confusion in Hartranft's mind. His efficient, careful way of dealing with difficult situations; his solicitude for the welfare of his men; his joy at their sturdy good health and his provisions for

\(^{15}\) Ibid.
\(^{16}\) Parker, \textit{51st Regiment}, pp. 230 ff.
\(^{17}\) Ibid.
\(^{18}\) Proceedings, Dedication of Antietam Monument, October 8, 1887, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
\(^{20}\) J. F. H. Acceptance of Rank of Brigadier, July 2, 1864, Stockham Collection (copy).
attaining and keeping that condition; his sense of fairness and justice in meting out punishments that were never vengeful and always corrective; his attentions to their families and his popularity with his fellow officers and the men serving under him attest the fact that Hartranft understood the military life and its needs thoroughly. He was not, however, a West Point man. He was not even a Regular Army man, but one of the lowly volunteers. He had been connected with the Fourth Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers whose name was not yet cleared. He had been overlooked in General Irvin McDowell's official report of Bull Run (to that general's admitted regret), and his own immediate commander's report, in which he had been highly praised, had received little attention. And he was young. At the time of Antietam he had not yet reached his thirty-second birthday. In addition to all this he was not a Union man of long standing, but one whose father had, only a few years before, been a candidate for important political office on the Democratic ticket. His regiment, too, had been almost entirely composed of Democrats from Montgomery County, "with only FORTY-TWO WIDE AWAKES among the number." These things formed an influence that, together with his own modesty, kept from greater and swifter recognition a man who deserved better treatment from his superiors. It must not be assumed, however, that Hartranft's friends did nothing on his behalf. There are indications in the Stockham Collection manuscripts that several were fairly active, and there are also some expressions of indignation at his failure to gain higher rank more speedily.

After Antietam, McClellan allowed the Confederate forces to withdraw unmolested. Colonel Hartranft commanded the brigade of which the 51st Pennsylvania Volunteers were a part during the absences of General Edward Ferrero. During these weeks, with the exception of one two-day pass home, Hartranft saw to the rehabilitation of his regiment and the pursuit of regular camp

43 Ibid.
44 Norristown Register and Watchman, July 9, 1861.
46 Parker, 51st Regiment, p. 249.
routines. Changes of quarters were frequent, but it was not until October 27, 1862, that Hartranft led his men across the Potomac River and southward as part of McClellan’s general movement. The following weeks saw an almost leisurely march through Virginia until November 17, when the Rappahannock was reached and the 51st encamped at Falmouth near Fredericksburg. Hartranft’s regiment formed part of Ferrero’s brigade, of Sturgis’s Division, in Orlando B. Wilcox’s IX Army Corps, in the army now commanded by Burnside.50

While waiting for the pontoons on which to cross the Rappahannock, Hartranft had his men out as pickets with a line reaching as far as the water’s edge. Finally, on December 12, 1862, the order to advance was received and Hartranft led his regiment across the pontoons to the Fredericksburg side of the river. The next day began one of the bloodiest engagements of the war, as far as the Union forces were concerned.51 Hartranft’s part in this action resulted in his superior’s reporting him as worthy of the “highest praise” for “his gallant conduct and valuable services.”52

By December 13, the enemy had begun to shell the town of Fredericksburg heavily, knowing it to be full of Union troops. On this day, Hartranft led his men through the streets to a brickyard where he had them crouch in the protection of the kilns and huge piles of bricks. He himself reconnoitered for the best avenue to their assigned position. He is described, field glasses to eyes, exposing himself whenever necessary in order to find the safest route for his men.

Enemy projectiles plunging into the brickworks showered all with fragments. When the reconnaissance was finished, Hartranft led his men into a railroad cut as a safer way to their position in the line. Past piles of Union dead, clustered near some wooden fences that only retarded progress without affording protection, they entered a storm of shot and shell that cut men down on all sides. While they attempted to cross a field to their line of battle, so heavy was the fire that some of the veterans of other hot engagements left their posts to seek shelter in the cellars of the town. The 51st had to borrow ammunition from nearby regiments

50 Ibid., pp. 250-268.
51 Ibid., pp. 268 ff.
when their own ran out, in desperation even taking what they
could from their fallen comrades during their four hours under
fire.\textsuperscript{55} When the regiment relieving them arrived, conditions were
such that Hartranft was unable to lead the men from the field, but
had to wait till darkness fell while his men remained crowded in
with those of the fresh units just arrived.\textsuperscript{54}

The next day was spent in resting and cleaning arms. But the
night of the 14th of December saw the beginning, for the 51st, of
one of the most trying of all engagements. During twenty-six
hours, the regiment was under constant fire without food, water,
or “the privilege of complying with the demands of nature which
caused those suffering from diarrhoea [sic] intense agony.”\textsuperscript{55} The
only protection was afforded by small hillocks six inches in height,
made with great difficulty by the prone men who scraped dirt
with their tin cups to protect their heads. Losses were fearful. The
Confederates had had plenty of time to prepare for attack, and
their artillery took heavy toll, while that of Burnside did little
good.\textsuperscript{56}

As a result of this bloody fight the Union army suffered much
more heavily than the Confederates and also failed to take Fred-
ericksburg. Burnside withdrew across the Rappahannock, leaving
the town still in the hands of the enemy. General Sturgis’s report
indicates that the part of the army engaged in the action in which
the 51st participated lost in killed and wounded more than one-
fifth of their total strength.\textsuperscript{57}

There followed a period of indecisive action culminating in
Burnside’s relief. He was ordered to the West and was followed
there by some of the units of his command in the Fredericksburg
campaign, among which was the 51st Pennsylvania Volunteers,
commanded still by Colonel John F. Hartranft.\textsuperscript{58}

The early months of 1863 were spent in camp, the armies be-
ing well-nigh immobilized by mud and weather. Hartranft and
others were sent home to recruit. He rejoined the regiment in
Kentucky after several smaller movements within that state, and
commenced the task of transporting his men to the vicinity of

\textsuperscript{55} Parker, \textit{51st Regiment}, pp. 268 ff.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., p. 275.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 276.
\textsuperscript{58} Parker, \textit{51st Regiment}, p. 289.
Vicksburg, Mississippi, on which Ulysses S. Grant was concentrating.

In 1863 Grant had been attempting to reduce the strong points that were impeding his plan to open the Mississippi River to Union navigation along its length. The 51st crossed the river below Vicksburg and in the subsequent actions near that town, and in the country between it and Jackson, so conducted itself that General Grant commended it for its assistance on August 1, 1863, and ordered “Vicksburg and Jackson” inscribed on its banners—banners already heavy with honors.  

During this campaign, Hartranft was stricken by what was called “remittent fever.” His condition was such that, although he retained command of the Second Brigade, he was confined to a couch in an ambulance from which he received and gave orders for the disposition of his troops. The historian of the 51st remarked, in connection with this period, that the battlefield was Hartranft’s life, and that if he could not be on it, he was determined not to be far from it. This contention was amply borne out when the colonel, sick as he was, mounted his horse long enough to lead his men into the fray. He was forced, however, to withdraw to the ambulance before the action was over. His brigade then went on to become the first unit to plant its colors on the grounds of the state Capitol, on July 13, 1863.

Soon after, the regiment and its colonel were ordered north and returned to camp across the river from Cincinnati, near Covington, Kentucky. Hartranft had been recommended to General Grant for promotion by General John G. Parke while the regiment was still in Mississippi. He was, however, “hors de combat” by this time, by action of the fevers contracted in the lowlands of Mississippi, and he spent the next two months at home recuperating from the attack of the only one of war’s agents that had been able to best him. Even this enemy was conquered at last, and his return to them with great satisfaction when he rejoined the regiment at Lenoir in East Tennessee on Sunday, November 15, 1863, on the eve of the battle of Campbell’s Station.
This battle is not renowned in the roster of great battles because it was won by the Union forces. Had the Confederates been able to seize possession of the junction of two roads, one from the west and one from the southwest, that joined to become the approach to Knoxville, Burnside would almost certainly have been captured with his entire command. They were far outnumbered by the Confederates, in poor physical condition, and in danger of being surrounded.63

The regiment had participated in the battle at Loudon, Tennessee, and was moving toward Knoxville on November 16, when they approached, with the rest of Burnside’s poorly equipped, half-starved men, the junction of the Kingston road with the road from the southwest along which James Longstreet’s Confederate vanguard raced. If Longstreet’s men should be first to reach Campbell’s Station where the two roads met, Burnside would be cut off from Knoxville.64 With Hartranft in command of the brigade, the 51st and its companion regiments trudged through the heavy mud, dragging artillery the horses were unable to move alone because of their overworked and underfed condition. With a quick, accurate assessment of the situation, Hartranft ordered part of his men to the right. He sent them across the intervening ground to a point where they cut the highway carrying the Confederate forces. This delayed Longstreet just long enough for Samuel N. Benjamin’s battery to be dragged into position. Faced with the roar of the cannon, Longstreet’s men were halted until Burnside’s main body went to take possession of Campbell’s Station and the road to Knoxville.65 For these inspired tactics, Hartranft was again recommended for promotion, this time by General Robert B. Potter, now commanding the IX Corps, who said in his report:

To Hartranft’s energy and prudence we are in a great measure indebted for our success in getting off all our artillery, and in preventing the enemy from getting on our line of retreat at the junction of the Kingston road; it is to be hoped that he may speedily receive the promotion so long and so well deserved.66

63 Parker, 51st Regiment, p. 449.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
With Burnside's inferior army inside Knoxville, Longstreet quickly laid siege to that place. Hartranft's men were placed to the right and at once set about fortifying their position. On the 18th of November, 1863, Hartranft had in process the erection of a three-gun fort and rifle pits for two regiments. He extended these lines and used a creek that flowed into Knoxville from the direction of the Confederate main forces to make his position doubly strong. This creek, known locally as First Creek, crossed Hartranft's line at right angles and was in turn crossed by a single-arch stone bridge carrying a street that paralleled his line.

Slinging heavy timbers across this arch below the water-line, he used the stone supports of the bridge to buttress them against the force of the water. Then, ordering dirt to be dumped into the creek, about a thousand cartloads of this material were used to form a strong dam that soon backed up the waters of the creek to form a lake. This body of water, from four to six feet deep and extending for miles to the front and right of Hartranft's position, made that section almost impossible to attack.67

The enemy then had to concentrate on Hartranft's left in his attempts to carry the Union works, but this he did energetically. Attack after attack was repulsed by the emaciated Union soldiers, whose commander, though still a colonel, now temporarily directed a division. The last desperate effort of the Confederates took one of the more advanced lines of defense, which was not recovered until the Union men had used axe-handles, clubs and the like in hand-to-hand fighting that finally beat off the Southerners.68 Soon after this Longstreet was compelled to raise the siege by the approach of William T. Sherman with a strong relieving force.

After the struggle for Knoxville, the last month of the three-year enlistment was drawing to a close for the 51st Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers. Although their three-year term had been one of bloody fighting, privation, and hardship, they were now being asked to re-enlist for another three years. Naturally there was no rush to sign on again. There was much talk about what to do, and Colonel Hartranft spoke to the regiment as a whole to help persuade them to stay in their country's service, and

67 Parker, 51st Regiment, pp. 489 ff.
68 Ibid., pp. 492-501.
weighed their "Selfish desires as opposed to the ennobling duty to their country.""\textsuperscript{69}

This appeal was not enough to change men's minds. There were many reasons for going home. They had fought long and well in many of the bloodiest engagements of the war. They had endured heat and fevers, cold and privation. No one could question their valor. They had done their part well. It was true that the job was as yet unfinished. But there were others who could take up the burden. The draft was bringing in new men for the armies. Army pay was low pay, and they had been away from their homes and families a long time.

Re-enlistment proceeded slowly. It was necessary for Hartranft to talk to the men individually and in small groups, bolstering the arguments of their comrades and their officers. Finally the last day for re-enlistment approached and, as Hartranft wrote to his father: "Men have come forward on short rations and bare feet on the ground to be mustered in for three years more," and "The Regiment has re-enlisted almost to a man of those present."\textsuperscript{70}

The re-enlisted 51st, now the 51st Veteran Volunteers, and their colonel were now entitled to a thirty-day furlough. They left for home on January 18, 1864---on foot.

The march to Nicholasville, Kentucky, to secure new outfits was a nightmare for the men and their officers. Food was as scarce as clothing, and many were clad in remnants of uniform. The moccasins that had been made out of green hides for the journey proved to be worthless, since the hair was on the outside and it picked up snow that made walking more difficult. The men marched through a country that was anything but friendly. They plodded through snow and wet weather, not only without proper food, but largely without food at all. The officers had to provide their own food by purchase, but this proved extremely difficult when possible at all, since the inhabitants had little enough for themselves. No one in the regiment had been paid for a long time.\textsuperscript{71}

When at last they arrived home, the tremendous reception given to the men who lived in Norristown added to the praise given to the men and officers by family and friends. But not all the people assembled to welcome the warriors were gladdened that day. Some

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., pp. 509 ff.

\textsuperscript{70} Letter, J. F. H. to Father, January 4, 1864, Stockham Collection.

\textsuperscript{71} Parker, \textit{51st Regiment}, pp. 509-518.
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learned only then of the death, in a distant place, of a husband, or a father, or a son. And not all the tears were those of joy, for the ranks were thinned now and losses had been heavy. When full, the regiment had numbered upwards of 900 men—now there were only 486.72

The days of furlough slipped swiftly by, as the days of furloughs will. The men reassembled and set about refitting and reorganizing. They left Annapolis under Burnside on April 23. The 28th saw them at Warrenton Junction where, on May 1, Burnside wrote directly to Stanton, the Secretary of War, asking that Hartranft’s commission as brigadier general be “carried through tomorrow.”73 At this time Hartranft commanded the First Brigade of the Third Division, IX Corps, consisting of four Michigan regiments and the 51st Pennsylvanians.74

Grant was now in supreme command. He ordered the army to advance southward where, in a few days, Hartranft led his men into the Wilderness. On May 6, they began their first engagement of the new enlistment in that tangle of trees and vines. From that day until after the battle at Spotsylvania, the armies were almost constantly engaged. This was a fearful slaughter. When Hartranft wrote to his wife concerning these actions, he reported that, while he was safe, his brigade had suffered “immensely,” with about 1,000 killed and wounded and four to five hundred prisoners. The fighting has been desperate.75

The good news at this time consisted of an interesting coincidence: The opposing brigadier general surrendered his sword “personally” to Hartranft on the very same day that Hartranft’s own commission as brigadier general is dated, May 12, 1864. Hartranft did not know of the second fact until later, however.76

It is not necessary to describe those days in May. The reports again tell of Hartranft rallying troops and inspiring them to return to face the enemy. The forces he commanded were in action, with but few days’ respite, until siege operations began at Petersburg. In the month between the 5th of May and the 4th of June,

72 Norristown Register and Watchman, February 2, 1864.
74 Letter, J. F. H. to Father, April 30, 1864, Stockham Collection.
76 Ibid.
Hartranft's own regiment, the 51st, lost 375 in killed and wounded.\textsuperscript{77}

On June 16, Hartranft reported personally to his fellow-townsmen, General Winfield S. Hancock of the II Corps, with his brigade. On June 17, when his units were charging the Confederates below Petersburg, Hartranft received his only wound. He was slightly touched on the left wrist in this action, and afterward had a narrow escape from a ball that passed through his clothing across his chest.\textsuperscript{78}

With the North losing heavily in Grant's attempt to crush the Southern forces, murmurs were loud against Grant's tactics. The Cold Harbor engagement shook the faith of the Union in Grant. Hartranft, however, held firm, writing his wife that he had "full faith in the final success of the Union Army under Grant." And later, "Let us hold on steadily with the grip of Grant and all will be well."\textsuperscript{79} For the actions in June, Hartranft was again commended by General Willcox, for "skill and courage of a high order."\textsuperscript{80}

The engagement of Hatcher's Run and Poplar Springs saw Hartranft heavily pressed. On July 8, Hartranft had a star knocked off his shoulder by a minie ball while he was in his quarters writing. He is described as continuing to write as if nothing had happened.\textsuperscript{81}

Hartranft's troops were stationed in the area under which the famous "Petersburg Mine" was dug. The 51st had been placed directly over the tunnel, but the men did not learn of the mine until it was nearly ready for the explosion, great secrecy being observed by all who knew of it. On the day set for the firing of the mine, the 51st moved back to make way for the colored troops who were to be given the honor of charging the works of the enemy.\textsuperscript{82} The fiasco resulting was, however, not due to any lack on their part. They "gave way" but Hartranft wrote that he was not surprised, considering "the manner and place they were put in..."\textsuperscript{83} When the mine went off, masses of the enemy for-

\textsuperscript{77} Parker, \textit{51st Regiment}, pp. 558-563.
\textsuperscript{78} Norristown \textit{Register and Watchman}, June 28, 1864.
\textsuperscript{79} Letter, J. F. H. to Wife, August 4, 1864, Stockham Collection.
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{O. R.}, Vol. XL, Pt. 1, p. 573.
\textsuperscript{81} Parker, \textit{51st Regiment}, pp. 571-572.
\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 574.
\textsuperscript{83} Letter, J. F. H. to Wife, August 1, 1864, Stockham Collection.
Before the breach was made, colored troops supported by white regiments charged through the breach. The ensuing confusion and failure of the attempt has been described elsewhere, and the whole was the subject of an official investigation.

Hartranft's view, and he was there in the crater, was expressed within a few days when he wrote about the affair to his wife:

We lost the best opportunity of a Grand Victory on the 30th I have ever seen. . . . The Army of the Potomac stood on the hills and cooly looked upon the struggle, but not a man would they send to reinforce and secure a victory. I was in the crater when the colored troops were repulsed by the enemy. All the ground then gained was lost besides many prisoners of white troops as well as black—my troops were then in the part of the fort not blown up, where I used two brass guns against the enemy as they continued to advance, with the guns and infantry we killed and wounded nearly their entire force coming against us (about 500)—we soon afterward received the order to retire from this part of the rebel line to our original line—But before we were ready to do so they again attacked us and I gave the order to retire—but I know that we could have repulsed them again, if we had not been ordered to retire—I had two of my orderlies killed by my side in the crater—a mortar [sic] shell exploded within six feet of me but not a scratch did I receive—I did not expose myself unnecessarily but I think I did my duty to the best of my understanding. . . . I am thankful to HIM who orders our destinies that I am safe. . . .

In August of 1864 there was much heavy fighting. While on August 18 Hartranft promised to send his wife the bullet that had knocked off his general's star, the very next day he had his horse killed under him, the bullet passing just behind his knees. This incident took place in the action on the Weldon Railroad, an action in which Hartranft led his men to the support of the V Corps. Hartranft had no orders to move, but this incident exemplifies his feeling that he was there to help his "team."
Later in August the IX Corps was reorganized, with Hartranft being given command of the Third Division. Later in September, while Hartranft was attempting to rally a regiment of another division, a bullet grazed his back, leaving its marks in his cape. His horse was so badly wounded that he had to be abandoned.

In the fall and winter of 1864-1865 the Third Division was made up largely of new recruits, men who had never seen an actual battle. These were the fruit of the conscription acts and a far cry from the veterans Hartranft had taken through the earlier war years. They had, however, the benefit of his experience with training new men for action. The value of Hartranft's experienced leadership was to be exhibited in a rather special way. His command was to earn for him the title "Hero of Fort Stedman" in an action calling for obedience to orders, courage, and rapidity of movement.

The Southern Cause was now living its last days. The hope of early peace while retaining the Confederacy was gone since Lincoln had been re-elected over McClellan. No foreign power had as yet intervened, and the Confederate forces as well as their supplies were dwindling, while those of the Union were increasing. Lee was penned in Richmond and Petersburg but thought it was possible to prolong the life of the Confederacy by trying to break out and join forces with General "Joe" Johnston.

The Union and Confederate lines were closest at Fort Stedman, the name given to one of the strong points facing the Southerners. To break through the Union lines was almost impossible because of the military devices of every kind used by the Northern troops to protect themselves from attack, and also because of the alert Union pickets. But General John B. Gordon had been assigned by Lee to carry out a plan Gordon had devised for a breakthrough at Fort Stedman. Just before dawn, Gordon would have his men, pretending to be Union reconnaissance parties, approach Grant's sentries and dispose of them without alarming the fort. This would permit the Confederate forces following at some distance, under cover of the darkness, to enter Fort Stedman and take its

88 Letter, J. F. H. to Wife, September 8, 1864, Stockham Collection.
89 Letter, J. F. H. to Wife, October 5, 1864, Stockham Collection.
90 Parker, 51st Regiment, pp. 591-600.
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garrison with little struggle. Simultaneously, the Southerners were
to sweep to their right and take the batteries between Forts Sted-
man and Haskell. This would provide a wide opening through
which Southern troops could flow and widen the breach. They
could then wreak havoc on the Union positions and make possible
Lee's escape from his lines.92

Hartranft's division was composed of six regiments. The officers
and men comprising these regiments had yet to see their first en-
counter with the enemy, being recruits who entered the army by
reason of Lincoln's call for 500,000 volunteers in the spring of
1864. They were encamped somewhat behind the lines around
Petersburg, in the vicinity of Fort Stedman, early on the morn-
ing of March 25, 1865.93 At 4:30 a.m. an alarm was heard from
the direction of the fort, which was under the command of Colonel
N. B. McLaughlin. Hartranft sent Captain Prosper Dalien, a
French officer attached to the Union army, to "ascertain causes," and
also sent orders to his brigade commanders to be ready for
any emergency.

At 5:10 Captain Dalien returned and reported that the enemy
had carried a portion of the Union lines including Fort Stedman
and some batteries to its left. A few minutes later directions came
from Major General Parke, commanding the IX Corps, to send
reinforcements to General Willcox, on Hartranft's right. Hart-
ranft started to his right in person and sent the 208th Regiment
to Fort Stedman to aid Colonel McLaughlin, since the 209th and
200th Regiments were already on the way to General Willcox's
headquarters.

Hartranft could now see the enemy advancing toward him from
the direction of Fort Stedman, driving a small remnant of the
57th Massachusetts Volunteers before them. He ordered the 57th
back and led them and the 200th Volunteers in an immediate at-
tack on the enemy. The Confederates were too strong for this
force, however, and he retired momentarily to an old line of works
about forty yards in the rear, the place from which the attack
was made.

Being afraid that the enemy would attack him because of this
retirement, Hartranft lunged a second time and gained a good

position, holding it about twenty minutes, but lost heavily when his line wavered. His troops fell back and were rallied again on the old line of works, the Confederates continuing their advance through the break.

It was now fairly light, and the 209th had made a connection with some Michigan regiments on the right. Hartranft felt that he could hold this line and ordered defensive action while he conferred with General Willcox, the division commander next to him on his right. About this time he received orders to cover Meade's Station, which was somewhat behind him and full of military supplies, and to retake the lines.

Hartranft ordered the 211th Regiment, which had been stationed considerably to the rear, but which was now coming up, to advance in full view of the enemy to distract them from the actions of the other regiments. When this was done, Hartranft ordered the main charge on the Southern forces in person. The appearance of their brigadier general in combat with them astonished the new men and inspired them. With only the few regiments actually on the line, they attacked the Confederate forces pouring through the breach.

Being distracted by the 211th Regiment marching in full view, the forces in gray were surprised at the suddenness of the charge and swept back by its ferocity. Just when the troops had begun moving in response to his order, Hartranft received orders to wait until reinforced by units of the VI Corps. Feeling that success was certain, Hartranft, however, allowed the charge to continue and by it retook Fort Stedman and the rest of the captured line to Battery 11. Included in the capture were "upwards of 3,000 Rebels, among them Maj. Gen. Ransom of Beauregard's command," and many battle flags, while the "Rebel dead laid thick all over the ground."

In brief and without embellishment, that was the affair of Fort Stedman. One author, in telling of the Confederate part in the engagement, called Hare's Hill by them, said that the troops "fought with a vigour and brilliancy that reminded one of Lee's old campaigns. . . ." Grant himself credited Hartranft for his

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Ibid.
Parker, 51st Regiment, pp. 610-611.
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part there, using the phrase “conspicuous gallantry” and, knowing the importance of the incident, had him brevetted major general immediately.98

Hartranft believed it possible that the rumors were true that both Grant and Lincoln had observed the action. Indeed, this is one way to account for the rapidity of his promotion to brevet major general—the only promotion he received with anything like the proper speed. It is interesting to note in connection with the promotion that, when General Parke, Hartranft’s superior officer, sent his recommendation to General George G. Meade asking that Hartranft be brevetted a major general “for his conspicuous gallantry in charging the enemy with his command . . . as well as for his industry and efficiency in organizing and disciplining his division, composed entirely of new regiments,” Meade made certain, by devoting a special dispatch to it, that Parke understood that he (Meade) had already made such a recommendation to Grant.99

In commenting on Lincoln’s alleged remark to Grant at the time of the countercharge, Hartranft wrote later: “He had seen, in truth, the repulse of the last offensive movement and heard the death-rattle of the Rebellion.”

But Hartranft did not attempt to wrap himself in glory because of his swift and decisive action on that day. A. K. McClure said of him concerning it: “Hartranft’s modesty forbade his claiming any special credit for the victory [at Fort Stedman] that really made him famous, but it was his soldierly training of the command that made the recapture of Fort Stedman possible even without specific orders.”100

The first act in the drama of the life of John F. Hartranft drew to a close shortly after Fort Stedman. True, the days following Appomattox found him as Military Governor of Petersburg.101 And he also was put in charge of guarding the Lincoln Conspirators, a job his sense of duty compelled him to accept and discharge.102 Even though he was recommended again for pro-

101 Letter, M. D. Rex to J. F. H., April 15, 1865, Stockham Collection.
motion by Meade, in June, 1865, this time to the full rank of major general, his army services ended with his resignation in order that he might take up a different sort of duty, as Auditor-General and then Governor of his State. We close here the Civil War services of John Hartranft with the words of his eulogist, who said, in part:

If modesty allied to courage, and tenderness of feeling to firmness of will; if prudence in judgement followed by swiftness in action, and a zeal for present interests tempered by a wise forecasting of the future, are the sure marks of greatness, then he was also great; for all of these qualities centered in John F. Hartranft.

References:

104 Letter, W. S. Hancock to J. F. H., September 15, 1866, Stockham Collection.