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# In Defense of Colonel Richard P. Roberts, Commanding Officer of the Pennsylvania 140th Regiment

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**In Defense of Colonel Richard P. Roberts,  
Commanding Officer of the Pennsylvania 140<sup>th</sup> Regiment**

by **Gregory Jason Bell**

Thesis submitted to  
The Graduate College of  
Marshall University  
In partial fulfillment of the  
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**ABSTRACT:**

In Defense of Colonel Richard P. Roberts,  
Commanding Officer of the Pennsylvania 140<sup>th</sup> Regiment

Gregory Jason Bell

Richard P. Roberts was the colonel of the Pennsylvania 140<sup>th</sup> regiment from its organization in September 1862 until his death at Gettysburg in July 1863. During this time period, Captain David Acheson of Company C fostered a “growing dislike” for the colonel that led him to portray the colonel negatively in his writings. Unfortunately for the colonel’s reputation, Acheson’s letters have been widely published, leading at least one historian to accept Acheson’s poor opinion of the colonel as fact. However, other primary sources exist which collectively demonstrate a positive regimental opinion of the colonel and further suggest that Acheson’s criticisms of the colonel were largely unwarranted and were a product of his own biases instead of an honest appraisal of the colonel’s performance. In fact, Colonel Roberts performed his duties admirably and is worthy of a commendation that, until now, the Acheson letters have largely denied him.

**DEDICATION:**

To my father, who believed in me, and to my mother, who supported me during this process. To my children, Tristen and Halina, who remind me everyday that the present is more important than the past. To my wife, Hana, who is simply my everything.

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A note on primary sources: quotes have been transcribed exactly as written, meaning no spelling or punctuation errors have been corrected.

There were “so many Longstreets, we could not make way through, so many Hills to climb, so many Stonewalls to batter down, Picketts to clear away. Oh, Richmond was a hard road to travel.” - John Paxton, *Sword and Gown*, 310.

## INTRODUCTION:

Captain David Acheson of the Pennsylvania 140<sup>th</sup> Regiment was so dissatisfied with the commanding officer of his regiment, Colonel Richard P. Roberts, that in letters home to his parents, he suggested that Colonel Roberts was unworthy of command and should be replaced. His brother, Alexander W. “Sandie” Acheson, also a member of the regiment, ultimately echoed these sentiments in his correspondence. Both men were well educated and articulate, and as such, their letters serve as compelling and damning testimony amounting to little less than a character assassination of Roberts.

These letters have been published in their entirety in two separate works, first in Jane Fulcher’s 1986 work titled *Family Letters in a Civil War Century: Achesons, Wilsons, Brownsons, Wisharts and Others of Washington, PA*<sup>1</sup> and then in Sara Gould Walters’s 1991 book, *Inscription at Gettysburg: In Memoriam to Captain David Acheson Company C, 140<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Volunteers*.<sup>2</sup> Fulcher’s book is exactly what the title indicates, simply a compilation of Civil War letters written by citizens of Washington County, Pennsylvania. Walters’s book, on the other hand, strives to be more than a compilation and is therefore worthy of further discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> Jane M. Fulcher, *Family Letters in a Civil War Century: Achesons, Wilsons, Brownsons, Wisharts and Others of Washington, PA* (Avella, Pennsylvania: Quality Quick Printing, 1986) (Hereafter all of the Acheson letters printed within this text will be cited simply as Fulcher, *Family Letters*, followed by the appropriate page number on which the referenced quote appears).

<sup>2</sup> Sara Gould Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg: In Memoriam to Captain David Acheson, Company C, 140<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Volunteers* (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 1991) (Hereafter all of the Acheson letters printed within this text will be cited simply as Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, followed by the appropriate page number on which the referenced quote appears).

Sara Gould Walters is a licensed tour guide at the Gettysburg National Military Park, and in this capacity, she became aware of a boulder on the battlefield that is inscribed with the epitaph, "D.A. 140 P.V." Walters's curiosity in this epitaph led her to do research and ultimately to write a book in which she printed verbatim the surviving letters of the Acheson brothers. These letters lend great insight into the daily activities and thoughts of the men of the 140<sup>th</sup>, from the formation of the regiment in September 1862 up to the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863. Walters also did an excellent job of filling in the gaps, including a family history of the Achesons, a brief history of Washington County, Pennsylvania where the brothers were born and raised, and a history of the formation of the different companies from the county, which, when combined with companies from Beaver, Greene and Mercer Counties, comprised the regiment. She also adequately placed the letters in the context of the activities of the regiment as well as in the larger context of the Civil War.

What Walters did not do, and what she never intended to do, was to write a history of the regiment. Her purpose in writing her book was simply to tell the story behind the epitaph. Therefore, although *Inscription at Gettysburg* is a good annotated source on two members of the regiment, or possibly even on Company C of the regiment, it is not a complete history. Walters made no comparison of the Acheson letters to other letters written by members of the regiment, she passed no judgment on the validity of the opinions contained within the letters, and she drew no conclusions other than to explain the origin of the

inscription. She simply told an interesting story, choosing to let the brothers' letters speak for themselves.

In presenting just one side of a multi-faceted and complex story, Walters certainly missed a great opportunity for a comparative study that would have shed important light on the mindset of the regiment as a whole. Further, in attempting to tell only the brothers' story and by not questioning the validity of their statements, she missed out on valuable insights into the identities of the brothers themselves. For instance, it would be interesting to know the motivations and biases of the brothers that in turn might explain the reasons for their opinions. With no evidence given, or at least not pinpointed, readers are forced to draw their own conclusions based only on the background information provided and the text of the letters themselves. This is not fair to the colonel of the regiment, who is repeatedly maligned in the Acheson letters. Walters has afforded the Acheson brothers an unopposed opportunity to voice their criticisms of the colonel. It is the mandate of any historian to test the validity of previously unopposed statements and to report the results, yet difficulty in blaming Walters for her one-sided story arises from the realization that Walters never intended to write a history of the regiment. She simply attempted to tell the story of David Acheson, and although she missed an opportunity at a more thorough biography on her subject, she did adequately accomplish what she set out to do.

Since Walters published her book on David Acheson in 1991, two works have been written dealing with the 140<sup>th</sup>, both published in 1996. In his book, *The*

*Life of General Samuel K. Zook*,<sup>3</sup> A. M. Gambone quoted the Acheson brothers often but steered clear of an assessment of Roberts based on the brothers' opinions. However, Walter Jeffers Vaughan, in his Ph.D. dissertation entitled "The Brand of Coward: Masculine and Patriotic Expectations in a Civil War Town," accepted the opinions of the Acheson brothers at face value and appraised Colonel Roberts accordingly. In doing so, Vaughan concluded that Roberts was "the regiment's most glaring failure:" he acted "foolishly," he lacked "integrity," and he was a liar who was guilty of intrigue and who was so focused on "political manipulations" that he "neglected the more serious business" of training his men.<sup>4</sup>

The Acheson brothers had every right to express negative opinions concerning their colonel. For Vaughan to pass judgment on Roberts based solely on their letters, without questioning the validity of the brothers' opinions and examining other primary evidence for verification, is disappointing. Undoubtedly, other primary sources were available to Vaughan. Instead, it seems that Vaughan was quick to accept the opinions of the Achesons, probably because their opinions supported his thesis.

If Vaughan had delved into other primary sources, he would have discovered that other men from the 140<sup>th</sup> regiment also frequently expressed their opinions concerning the leadership of their regiment. Their views provide a broader regimental opinion of Roberts. Furthermore, from these surviving letters

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<sup>3</sup> A. M. Gambone, *The Life of General Samuel K. Zook: Another Forgotten Union Hero* (Baltimore: Butternut and Blue, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Walter Jeffers Vaughan, "The Brand of Coward: Masculine and Patriotic Expectations in a Civil War Town" (Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1996), 230-231, 320-321.

valuable insights can be gleaned not just on the character of Roberts but on the authors of the letters themselves. As these letters are examined, certain biases, which cast doubt on the definitiveness of the opinions of individual authors such as the Achesons, become apparent. Possible factors that created biases within the regiment include age, occupation, county of origin and political affiliation. Identifying these biases and taking them into account makes it possible to place the Acheson letters in their proper perspective, as two opinions among many. Therefore, only when a consensus of opinion is identified can the true value of Roberts, as both a man and a leader of men, be determined. The consensus opinion is that Roberts was both liked and respected by the majority of his men. Furthermore, evidence also exists suggesting that the opinion of the Acheson brothers might have changed after the regiment's first battle.

Finally, in evaluating the performance of a man, a fair and complete assessment of Roberts also requires an examination of the opinions of scholars. Unfortunately, the secondary sources on the 140<sup>th</sup> regiment itself are few, but sources which document the regiment's participation in battles and as a member of the Army of the Potomac abound, and these sources do nothing to challenge the consensus developed from the primary sources that Colonel Roberts is worthy of respect and deserves a commendation, which the popular Acheson letters have, to this point, largely denied him.

## CHAPTER ONE: Formation of a Regiment

Before an appraisal of the wartime performance of Colonel Richard Roberts is attempted, it is first necessary to know some pertinent background information not only about Roberts but also about the members of the regiment. Therefore, this chapter begins with a brief biography of Roberts and then identifies how and why he became involved in the war. A discussion on the formation of the regiment, the general characteristics of its members and Roberts's rise to power within the regiment, follows. This information is worthwhile because it is important to understand the characteristics of the man being judged, in this case Roberts, as well as the characteristics of the men whose expressed opinions play an important role in crediting or discrediting his performance.

Richard P. Roberts, one of nine children of John Roberts and Ruth Dungan, was born on 5 June 1820 on a seventy-acre family farm near Frankfort Springs, Beaver County, Pennsylvania.<sup>1</sup> His parents instilled in him a great pride in his ancestry, for he was the grandson of both a soldier in the American Revolution on one side of the family and an Indian fighter on the other side.<sup>2</sup> They also made sure that he was well educated, probably too much so to be a farmer. Unsurprisingly, in 1845 he abandoned the farm and moved to Beaver, Pennsylvania in order to pursue a career in law. Admitted to the bar on 15 March

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<sup>1</sup> Richard G. Temple, "Colonel Richard P. Roberts, Commanding Officer of the 140<sup>th</sup> Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1862-1863," 2002, 2, unpublished source.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Laird Stewart, D. D., *History of the One Hundred and Fortieth Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers* (Pennsylvania: 1912; reprint, Salem, Massachusetts: Higginson Book Company, 1998), 360 (future page citations are to the reprint edition).

1848, he formed a law partnership with Henry Hice.<sup>3</sup> Roberts apparently was a very successful lawyer and was even appointed district attorney of Beaver County.<sup>4</sup> His personal life, on the other hand, was filled with tragedy. He married Caroline Henry of Beaver on 1 May 1851, and they had three children together, but only one of them, Emma J., born in 1854, survived infancy. Then Caroline herself died on 4 February 1862 at the age of 31.<sup>5</sup>

Roberts, a staunch Republican and “a fearless advocate and supporter of the Lincoln administration,”<sup>6</sup> was very upset about the South’s secession from the Union. Henry Hice described Roberts as “[p]ublic spirited and patriotic in the highest degree, he was earnest, eloquent, and indefatigable in his efforts for the safety and preservation of the Union.”<sup>7</sup> On 11 March 1861, Roberts expressed his passionate political sentiments in a letter to a friend in Europe:

I love my country, am the descendant of Revolutionary Sires, and am willing to contribute in my small way to maintain its honor, its integrity and its glorious flag, but I have had to stand by and see it trailed in the dust by its enemies. I believe there is a God who presides over the destinies of Nations and of men, who will, as He has heretofore done, preserve the Nation and punish both here and hereafter the men who have labored to destroy it. I have passed a Winter of anguish by day and night, seeing the glorious fabric my Fathers helped to rear, tumbling to pieces around me, with the imps of hell all over it with their sacreligious hands speeding their work. Oh God! I invoke the wrath upon the enemies and destroyers of my country, in the name of the heroes who cemented the fabric, my own ancestors among the number – I invoke it!”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Temple, “Colonel Richard P. Roberts,” 2-3, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Stewart, *History*, 360.

<sup>5</sup> Temple, “Colonel Richard P. Roberts,” 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Stewart, *History*, 323.

<sup>7</sup> Temple, “Colonel Richard P. Roberts,” 10.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

Based on these sentiments, no wonder Roberts was, from the very beginning, very involved in the pro-war movement.

A mass-meeting, called the “People’s Meeting,” was held in Beaver, Pennsylvania on 4 February 1861. Supporters of both the outgoing and the incoming federal administrations spoke their minds concerning the national crisis. During that meeting, Samuel B. Wilson, a prominent Democratic attorney, appealed for “moderation and leniency” towards the South. Roberts then took the podium and “presented with fiery eloquence the reasons which the North had for opposing slavery and secession.”<sup>9</sup> After these speeches, the Democrats passed a series of resolutions and then withdrew from the meeting, allowing the Republicans to pass a counter series of resolutions. Then on 22 April of the same year, after the South’s attack on Fort Sumter, another meeting of citizens was held in Beaver. This meeting elected officers who then appointed a committee on resolutions, which included Roberts. He was also elected to the Committee of One Hundred, which was given the purpose of charting a course of action for the county.<sup>10</sup>

Roberts spent the rest of 1861 and the first half of 1862 arguing in support of the Union cause in every district, village and hamlet where “mass meetings, addressed by able and eloquent speakers, were held; pledges of loyalty were renewed; money was freely subscribed.”<sup>11</sup> Then the time for words was over, replaced by a call for action. On 1 July 1862, after the failed Peninsula campaign,

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph H. Bausman, *History of Beaver County Pennsylvania and Its Centennial Celebration*, Vol. 2 (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1904), 491.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 491-495.

<sup>11</sup> Stewart, *History*, 3.

President Lincoln requested the states to furnish 300,000 men to the war effort, then one month later he requested an additional 300,000 troops.<sup>12</sup> Within three weeks, Governor Andrew Curtin of Pennsylvania authorized the immediate enlistment of twenty-one new regiments of volunteer infantry which would serve for “three years or during the war.”<sup>13</sup> At a public meeting of over 15,000 people held in Allegheny City three days later, the governor prefaced his appeal for volunteers with these semi-accurate yet dramatic words: “The Peninsula campaign is a failure! The Union armies have not been victorious! They have been driven back to the gates of Washington, notwithstanding all reports to the contrary!”<sup>14</sup>

Roberts did not wait for Governor Curtin to make the official announcement that Pennsylvania would raise regiments. Instead, as soon as Lincoln made the call, Roberts contacted Curtin and obtained permission from the governor to recruit a company in Beaver County.<sup>15</sup> This done, he went about Beaver County actively recruiting. In his diary, Joseph Moody, who signed on, described one such recruiting meeting:

Monday July 18, 1862, in the Presbyterian Church at Hookstown there was a meeting held Presided over by Rev. R. S. Morton ( ) Pastor for the Purposs of raising a ( ) to form a Regiment Col. R. P. Roberts, Revt Marcus Ormond & R. S. Morton, spoke about 75 men signed their names the next night there was a meeting held at

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<sup>12</sup> Erwin Stanley Bradley, *The triumph of militant Republicanism; a study of Pennsylvania and presidential politics, 1860-1872* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 153-154.

<sup>13</sup> Timothy Brookes, “The Walking Artillery: Off to War With the 140<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry,” *Military Images Magazine*, 10 (January-February 1989), 23.

<sup>14</sup> Stewart, *History*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

Frankfort where 25 men Signed which was called Roberts 2<sup>nd</sup> Co including the Hookstown Boys.<sup>16</sup>

Roberts also posted the following notice in the local newspaper, the *Beaver Argus*, on 13 August 1862: "Being authorized to recruit a Company for Three Years or the War, the subscriber will receive recruits at his office in Beaver. All reporting themselves will be subsisted for 20 days, at least, in Beaver. Aug. 6. '62 R. P. Roberts." As a result of such recruiting efforts, Roberts ultimately recruited not just one company, but three, each comprising roughly 100 men.<sup>17</sup>

While Roberts was busy recruiting in Beaver County, John Fraser, a professor of mathematics and astronomy at Jefferson College in Canonsburg, Washington County used his position of influence to recruit a company of his own.<sup>18</sup> One student recalled Fraser making the following announcement to his class:

Gentlemen, what the stars are up to is now of no interest to us. We will leave Mars to his own business . . . and become sons of Mars with 'On to Richmond' as our cry. Permit me to introduce to you Captain John Fraser and to announce that the chair of the mathematics in this college is now vacant.<sup>19</sup>

Another student remembered the last hour in Fraser's classroom when the professor said: "Young gentlemen- this is our last hour of recitation together. The country needs strong and brave defenders, and since I am sound in wind and

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph Moody, diary, 18 July 1862. Lewis Leigh Collection, Book 2, 61, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania (Hereafter, the diary of Joseph Moody will be cited simply by last name and date); of interest here is that Roberts is already being referred to as a colonel, an office that he would not officially hold until much later.

<sup>17</sup> Temple, "Colonel Richard P. Roberts," 10.

<sup>18</sup> Sally Walters, "Civil War Profiles: Col. John Fraser, 140<sup>th</sup> PA," <http://www.gettysburgtourguides.org/Dispatch/fraser.html>, 1, last viewed 11 March 2004; Jefferson College was a Presbyterian school that specialized in training clergy for the frontier.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

limb, I see no good reason why I should not enroll myself with them.”<sup>20</sup> These speeches had the desired effect. Stewart, the regimental historian, stated, “In the thrill of excitement which followed these words, there were many who then and there made the resolve to cast in their lot with him as a band of sworn defenders of the country and its flag.”<sup>21</sup> Soon after, “with shrill of fife and roll of drum, the newly gathered bands of volunteers went about the streets.”<sup>22</sup>

The recruits who would ultimately comprise the 140<sup>th</sup> regiment came from four counties on Pennsylvania’s western border: Washington, Beaver, Greene and Mercer. They were young, on average about twenty-three years old, “with all the exuberance and not a little of the indiscretion of youth.”<sup>23</sup> Drawn mostly from rural districts and from, what Stewart called, “the same rank and circumstances of life,”<sup>24</sup> the recruits had been mostly farmers, mechanics and students. For instance, in Company H of Beaver County, 100 out of 133 members farmed.<sup>25</sup> Washington County, on the other hand, was represented by students from two colleges, with Company C largely comprised of Washington College recruits and Company G represented mainly by men affiliated with Jefferson College. In fact, all of the commissioned officers of Company G were connected with the college.<sup>26</sup> Of their ethnic origin, there were many German recruits, but the vast majority was “of the sturdy, God-fearing Scotch-Irish race.”<sup>27</sup> The political

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<sup>20</sup> Edmund J. Raus, Jr., *A Generation on the March- The Union Army at Gettysburg* (Lynchburg, Virginia: H.E. Howard, Inc., 1987), 134-135.

<sup>21</sup> Stewart, *History*, 366.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 337, 5.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 337-347.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

affiliation of the recruits depended largely on their county of origin. Beaver County tended to vote Republican, Mercer leaned Republican, Washington was evenly split between the two parties, and Greene was a Democratic stronghold.<sup>28</sup> Although many of the recruits were already married, a fair number of single men joined not just out of a sense of patriotism but to impress the ladies in their community. For example, John Paxton wrote in his memoirs that “a group of girls of dangerous age and eyes asked me why I was not at the Front.” So he went down to the recruiting office and “took the oath,” and then “went back and told the girls.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, women, either as wives, girlfriends, love interests, or even daughters, played a major role in the recruitment of the 140<sup>th</sup> regiment.

Just because groups of would-be soldiers were being raised in four neighboring counties did not necessarily mean that these groups would be formed into a regiment. In fact, they might just as likely have been added piecemeal to the depleted ranks of other pre-existing regiments. Evidence of this is found in a letter written on 2 September 1862 by Samuel Potter, a member of Company E, which stated, “We came very near being sent to Washington City yesterday to fill up an old regiment that has suffered severe loss in the late fights. We escaped by every man refusing to go in an old regiment.”<sup>30</sup> Potter’s assertion that his company did not go to Washington because they did not want to is doubtful. Instead, the companies’ ultimate amalgamation into a single

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<sup>28</sup> Arnold M. Shankman, *The Pennsylvania Antiwar Movement, 1861-1865* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1980).

<sup>29</sup> John R. Paxton, D. D., *Sword and Gown*, (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1926), 310.

<sup>30</sup> Samuel Potter, letter to his wife Sophie, 2 September 1862, Library of Congress Archival Manuscript Material Collection (Hereafter, the correspondence of Samuel Potter will be cited simply by last name, location and date).

regiment was undoubtedly due largely to the actions of District Attorney Richard Roberts of Beaver County and Professor John Fraser of Washington County.<sup>31</sup>

Stewart described the formation of the 140<sup>th</sup> regiment out of ten companies from four counties as a spirited struggle,

requiring a hasty journey of Captain Fraser to Beaver to see Colonel Roberts, and telegraphic correspondence between Roberts and Governor Curtin, ending with the kind words of Governor Curtin and the answer that these companies should be formed into one regiment.<sup>32</sup>

Roberts clearly served as the group's primary contact with Governor Curtin,<sup>33</sup> a fact that would have great importance in the later election of officers. Notably, the company from Mercer County, which does not border the other three counties but is instead separated from them by Lawrence County, was not part of the original regimental formation but was added weeks later after the companies arrived in Harrisburg.

The preparations the companies took to leave home and the celebrations that marked their departures differed in detail but shared the same general characteristics. The recruits usually camped together for a week or two in their county and trained on their own. The men who recruited the companies acted as captains, and none of them had any more skill or knowledge in military matters than their recruits.<sup>34</sup> The training did not amount to much. Family and townspeople filled the temporary camps, resulting in a camp life that resembled a social event far more than a serious military venture.

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<sup>31</sup> Vaughan, "Brand of Coward," 223-224.

<sup>32</sup> Stewart, *History*, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Vaughan, "Brand of Coward," 223-224.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

The three companies from Beaver County were mustered into the service on 21 August 1862 in a large ceremony in the public square in Beaver.<sup>35</sup> Then after camping and training in Beaver another week, they said goodbye to their loved ones and traveled via train to Harrisburg, where they encamped at Camp Curtin.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, on 22 August,<sup>37</sup> the five companies of Washington County, having been “addressed by venerable citizens and told ‘to trust in God, but keep our powder dry’,” having been “prayed for by the clergy and kissed by mothers, sisters and sweethearts,” marched off, “singing ‘John Brown’s Soul Goes Marching on,’ and thinking of the girl we left behind.”<sup>38</sup> Their destination was Pittsburgh, where they were mustered into the service that afternoon.<sup>39</sup> Immediately after the mustering, the new recruits reported to the quartermaster’s department where each received a regulation federal uniform.<sup>40</sup> They then began rudimentary training, but with no regimental or camp authority offering guidance, the training was once again left to company officers. Thus, in the regimental history, Stewart referred to themselves at this time as “the awkward squad.”<sup>41</sup> But, this awkward period was brief, for soon they too received an order to take the Pennsylvania Central Railroad from Pittsburgh to Harrisburg.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Stewart, *History*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Temple, “Colonel Richard P. Roberts,” 3-4.

<sup>37</sup> It should be noted that these dates differ from the dates listed in Hewitt’s *Supplement to the Official Records*. For those dates, see Volume 62, Serial 74, page 445.

<sup>38</sup> Paxton, *Sword and Gown*, 311.

<sup>39</sup> Vaughan, “Brand of Coward,” 209.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>42</sup> B. F. Powelson, *History of Company K of the 140<sup>th</sup> Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers (1862 – ’65)* (Steubenville, Ohio: The Carnahan Printing Company, 1906, reprint, Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI, 2003), 14 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

At Camp Curtin in Harrisburg these nine “vaguely unified companies” met for the first time, but still they “seemed to co-exist and operate independently.”<sup>43</sup> No regimental or camp authority imposed much discipline on the new recruits, and everyone was having, according to one soldier, “plenty of fun.” This was largely due to the fact that, at that time, internal politics dominated the attention of the officers. “In preparation for the companies’ immanent amalgamation,” organizers were making “concrete agreements about over-all executive leadership.”<sup>44</sup> They were also seeking a tenth and final company to join their ranks and complete the regiment. This position was ultimately filled by an available company from Mercer County.

The 140<sup>th</sup> regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers officially formed at Camp Curtin on 8 September 1862.<sup>45</sup> The first order of business was to elect regimental officers. With nine officer and six non-commission officer posts required to complete a regimental staff, and with no firm official guidelines as to whom should get what post, the company officers were required to “negotiate a power structure acceptable to all parties.” At the same time each officer hoped that he would receive one of the coveted appointments.<sup>46</sup>

Because Washington County comprised fifty percent of the regiment, Beaver County thirty percent, and Greene County and Mercer County each ten percent of the regiment, logic seemed to suggest that Washington County, having the greatest representation in the regiment, would secure the top

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<sup>43</sup> Vaughan, “Brand of Coward,” 216.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 217-218.

<sup>45</sup> Stewart, *History*, 10; Frederick H. Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion*, Volume III (New York and London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959), 1616.

<sup>46</sup> Vaughan, “Brand of Coward,” 221-222.

regimental commands.<sup>47</sup> The election, however, yielded different results, with Richard P. Roberts of Beaver County elected as the colonel of the regiment, John Fraser of Washington County elected lieutenant colonel, and Thomas B. Rodgers of Mercer County elected major.<sup>48</sup> Apparently some unwritten rules dictated these results.

According to Bell Wiley in his book, *The Life of Billy Yank*, elections of

colonels and majors by company officers was common practice. . . . But frequently, if not usually, the voting was a mere formality, it being a foregone conclusion that persons responsible for recruiting the units, or previously approved by the governor, would become the officers.<sup>49</sup>

Further, in his dissertation, "The Brand of Coward," Walter Vaughan asserted that commission claims were usually based on recruiting prowess, "active connections to the regiment's organization," and past military experience.<sup>50</sup>

District Attorney Richard Roberts of Beaver County and Professor John Fraser of Washington County both headed the mobilization of forces in their respective counties and were "principally responsible for the amalgamation of the various companies." Furthermore, Roberts served as the group's primary contact with Governor Curtin. Because almost eighty percent of the regiment came from Washington and Beaver Counties, their triumphs made considerable sense.<sup>51</sup>

The selection of the remaining staff offices resulted in heated negotiations between the company officers. Ultimately, Thomas Rodgers of Mercer County

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<sup>47</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 20.

<sup>48</sup> Bausman, *History of Beaver County*, 517.

<sup>49</sup> Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank; The Common Soldier of the Union* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1981), 24.

<sup>50</sup> Vaughan, "The Brand of Coward," 222.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 223-224.

was awarded the rank of major, the third highest post in the regiment, but his appointment was “clearly a concession,” possibly to the two companies not from either Beaver or Washington counties, but more probably specifically dealing with the Mercer company’s agreement to join the regiment. However, it would not be at all true to suggest that this concession came without a great deal of contention. In fact, Vaughan stated that “Rodgers’s nomination resembled a backroom deal more than an election.”<sup>52</sup>

Obviously, “various county factions harbored their own agendas.”<sup>53</sup> Washington County captains sought to secure the chaplaincy of the regiment for their man, Boyle, for they valued the spiritual leadership of the regiment and were willing to make concessions in order to get it.<sup>54</sup> On 8 September 1862, Captain David Acheson of Company C from Washington County wrote very matter-of-factly to his father concerning the election of regimental officers:

The officers of our regiment had a meeting today and held an election for field officers. The following officers were elected:  
Col. Roberts  
Lt. Col. Fraser  
Maj. Rodgers of Mercer County  
Boyle I think is safe. We gave up our claim to Major in order to secure the Chaplaincy to Boyle.<sup>55</sup>

In surrendering the claim to the position of major, the Washington County captains assumed that Colonel Roberts would reciprocate by ensuring Washington the chaplaincy. However, this decision, along with the rest of the elections and appointments, would have to wait. With so many companies

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 226-227.

<sup>55</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 18; Fulcher, *Family Letters*, 355.

arriving in Harrisburg, Camp Curtin was seriously overcrowded. Therefore, according to historian William J. Miller, “Efforts were made to organize and dispatch regiments as quickly as possible so room could be made for others.”<sup>56</sup> On the evening of 9 September, the 140<sup>th</sup> regiment received orders to leave Camp Curtin and go, “no person in the regiment, not even the Colonel, knew where.”<sup>57</sup> Of this first action of the new regiment, Sandie Acheson was not very complimentary:

The starting, stopping and everything connected with the moving of the regiment, was the most miserably botched up affair ever I heard of. The Col. was not present. The Lt. Col. had no written orders—no instructions and did not know where we were going . . .<sup>58</sup>

Nonetheless, at 4:00 a.m. on the 10<sup>th</sup>, the regiment finally boarded a train and ultimately ended up in Parkton, Maryland, twenty-nine miles north of Baltimore, where it would be stationed, with the purpose of protecting the Northern Central Railroad line between Baltimore and the Pennsylvania-Maryland state line from Confederate vandals.<sup>59</sup>

In summary, evidence suggests that Roberts was passionate for the Union cause and would do anything within his power to defend it, even if it meant leaving his only daughter parentless. Further, taking the unwritten rules of appointments into account, it is apparent that Roberts was the right man to be elevated to the post of colonel. Certainly no member of the regiment had more

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<sup>56</sup> William J. Miller, *The Training of an Army: Camp Curtin and the North's Civil War* (Shippensburg, Pennsylvania: White Mane Publishing Co., 1990), 52.

<sup>57</sup> *Beaver Argus* (Beaver, Pennsylvania) Volume 38, Number 41, 8 October 1862, correspondence from Marcus Ormond, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Fulcher, *Family Letters*, 393.

<sup>59</sup> Samuel P. Bates, *History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861-5*, Volume 7 (Harrisburg: B. Singerly, 1869-1871; reprint, Wilmington, North Carolina: Broadfoot Publishing, 1993), 407 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

knowledge in political or military affairs than Roberts, and no man worked harder towards the formation of the regiment. Finally, within the regiment there was no dispute over Roberts's appointment, suggesting that at the time, the men, regardless of individual characteristics or county origin, were satisfied with their new leader.

## CHAPTER TWO: Camp Life in Parkton, Maryland

Now that the 140<sup>th</sup> regiment existed and Roberts was at its helm, Roberts had to switch gears from lawyer and political activist to a leader of a large force of men, all of whom would be watching his actions and forming opinions based on his abilities to lead them. The months spent in Parkton, Maryland were Roberts's opportunity not only to learn how to be a colonel but to win the respect of his men in the process.

The day before the men of the 140<sup>th</sup> arrived in Harrisburg, Lee's army crossed the Potomac into Maryland. For this reason, the men of the new regiment expected an immediate assignment to active combat, and many were disappointed when they were instead given the duty of guarding what they considered an insignificant railroad line in a remote location. In fact, one soldier, in frustration, described the Northern Central Railroad as an "old, broken down, worn out, one horse railroad."<sup>1</sup> And the town of Parkton was no more impressive, for it could boast only "a church, hotel, store, village, post-office, two or three shanties, and ambrotype car."<sup>2</sup>

At Parkton, the regiment was formally assigned to Major General John Wool's Eighth Army Corps; however, the regiment had little to no contact with this larger organization, which was composed of many largely independent encampments.<sup>3</sup> The problem of how to guard miles of railroad line from one location soon confronted regimental leadership. Ultimately, the successful guarding of the line required dividing the regiment into multiple encampments.

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<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, "The Brand of Coward," 233-237.

<sup>2</sup> *Beaver Argus*, Volume 38, Number 40, 1 October 1862, 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

The headquarters, established on a hill overlooking the railroad and named Camp Seward,<sup>4</sup> was home to the regimental officers and Companies B, F, and I.<sup>5</sup> The rest of the regiment was spread out over twenty miles, reaching from the Pennsylvania state line to Monkton, Maryland:<sup>6</sup> Company A was stationed at Parkton Barracks, Companies C and D at Bee Tree Station, Company E at Whitehall, Company H at Burns Switch, and Company K at Monkton.<sup>7</sup>

Once the companies were situated and duties established, the company captains met back at Camp Seward to take up the regimental business that had been interrupted at Camp Curtin by the orders to move out. The first order of business was to assign each company a letter that would identify that company for the remainder of the war. These letters, by necessity, have already been alluded to, but the story of how each company was matched with a letter is worthy of note. Marcus Ormond wrote a letter to the *Beaver Argus* informing the paper's readers why letter designation was important and how the designations were made:

In the battle, the letters by which the company is known, decides its position. The letter A is a post of peculiar honor as well as comparative safety, as I understand it, when engaged in the battle; so we all had a desire to place our men in a favorable position. We all wanted the letter A. . . . knowing that the lives of our men in ordinary circumstances depended upon our position in the regiment, and that our position was decided by letter, we came to

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<sup>4</sup> Stewart, *History*, 292.

<sup>5</sup> Janet B. Hewett, ed., *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Part II- Record of Events, Volume 62, Serial Number 74 (Wilmington, North Carolina: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1988), 446.

<sup>6</sup> Richard A. Sauers, *Advance the Colors! Pennsylvania Civil War Battle Flags*, Volume II (Pennsylvania: Capitol Preservation Committee, 1991), 426.

<sup>7</sup> Hewett, *Supplement to the Official Records*, 446.

the conclusion that we would refer the thing to the providence of God.<sup>8</sup>

Stewart, the regimental historian, put it more bluntly, writing that each captain drew from a hat a letter from A to K that would signify his company.<sup>9</sup> The result of this drawing was as follows: Company A was from Greene County; Company B was from Mercer County; Companies C, D, E, G and K were from Washington County, and Companies F, H and I were from Beaver County. There was no letter J in the hat. The positions in line of battle were then designated as follows: A, F, D, I, C, H, E, K, G, B.<sup>10</sup>

The regiment next needed to hold regimental elections and make appointments that had been delayed by the regiment's move to Parkton. As previously mentioned the Washington County captains gave up their claim to major because they assumed that Colonel Roberts would appoint Reverend Boyle, their candidate for chaplain. However Roberts ultimately appointed Marcus Ormond of Beaver County to the position of chaplain, and then went one step further and appointed William Shallenberger, also of Beaver County, as adjutant. At first glance, it appears that Roberts allowed his appointments to be influenced by county loyalty, but an in-depth examination of available evidence suggests more variables at play.

First, it has already been mentioned that recruiting prowess was one of the key factors in the determination of regimental leadership. As soon as the call for 300,000 troops went out, William Shallenberger of Beaver County received

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<sup>8</sup> *Beaver Argus*, Volume 38, Number 41, 8 October 1862, correspondence from Marcus Ormond, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Stewart, *History*, 292.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

authority from Governor Curtin, “to raise 15 men which would entitle him to a 2d Lieutenancy. He raised the men very promptly, but afterwards united himself with Capt. Roberts’ company.”<sup>11</sup> Because he raised these men, Shallenberger, following the unwritten rules of determining regimental leadership, had the right to be an officer. This, combined with the fact that Colonel Roberts knew Shallenberger personally and valued his “capacity,” made Shallenberger’s appointment as adjutant, in hindsight, seem natural.<sup>12</sup>

Second, concerning the chaplaincy, the Reverend Marcus Ormond wanted very much to be the regimental chaplain and was willing to give up his captaincy of Company H to get it. Describing this offer, and giving his opinion of it, Captain David Acheson wrote:

I am writing from Head-quarters. Was ordered here to be at a meeting of Captains in order to decide upon chaplain. Wash. Co. companies stand up for Boyle. Capt. Ormond has offered to give Boyle the Captaincy of his co. if he will resign all claims to chaplaincy. The co. held an election this morning and gave Boyle 70 [?] votes. No doubt but he will obtain both positions in the end for Ormond is totally unfit for service of any kind whatever.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, as demonstrated by an entry in the diary of James McDonald Mitchell, sergeant of Company H, the men of Company H of Beaver County did not want Boyle as their captain:

Boyl being a candidate for Chaplain, Ormand would exchange his position for his (Boyl) chance of Chaplain of the Regt. But it didn’t go down with the boys. Got up a petition for Sam Lawrence for Capt. Got 53 signers. Tho. Thorn being a candidate but can’t

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<sup>11</sup> *Beaver Argus*, Volume 38, Number 40, 1 October 1862, 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 25; Fulcher, *Family Letters*, 356.

come in. Capt. called to see our mess on the subject. Told him we wouldn't take the one-horse Methodist preacher. No how.<sup>14</sup>

So the men of Washington County wanted Boyle to be chaplain, and the men of Company H of Beaver County did not want Boyle, a Washington County man, as their captain. Based on this information, Roberts's decision should have been cut and dry, with Boyle as chaplain and Ormond as captain, but that is not at all what happened. Ormond was awarded the chaplaincy, and Boyle took Ormond's place, at least temporarily, as captain of Company H. However, possibly with the exception of Boyle, Roberts's appointments angered no one. Note David Acheson's letter to his father, dated 18 September 1862, where he detailed the results of the elections and appointments:

Boyle was elected Capt. of Ormond's Co. and Ormond was elected Chaplain. My recruit from Indiana, H.J. Boatman, has been appointed Sergeant Major of the Regt., thereby taking one from my company . . . Washington County has secured the Lieut. Col., S.M., and the 3d, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> places in regt.<sup>15</sup>

Surprisingly, Acheson did not register the slightest bit of disappointment in losing the chaplaincy. Apparently he cared more about the many appointments his fellow Washington men did win. Nor did Acheson in any way express displeasure with his colonel. Instead, he simply told his father: "You may have expected to hear something from [me] concerning our field officers, but I am not prepared to say anything of them as officers. As men I like them very well."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Florida DAR Genealogical Records Committee, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell, Sergeant, Company H, 140<sup>th</sup> Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers, August 1862 – May 1864*, Florida DAR Genealogical Records Committee Report, Series 2, Volume 150 (Dunedin, Florida: Caladesi Chapter of DAR, 1998), 3 (Hereafter cited as Florida DAR, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell*, followed by a page number).

<sup>15</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 25-26; Fulcher, *Family Letters*, 357.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

Apparently the negotiations that took place at the captains' meeting appeased everyone, except for Boyle, who seems to have been abandoned by Washington County representatives in favor of receipt of other regimental appointments. Even Company H of Beaver County was satisfied, for after receiving a petition from the company, Roberts decided to grant the company its wish to hold an October election to choose their own officers, which they did, electing Samuel Campbell as their new captain.<sup>17</sup> The only apparent loser in the negotiations, Reverend Boyle, resigned in October, citing illness, and went home to Washington County.<sup>18</sup>

Hence, contrary to the opinion of historian Walter Vaughan that the appointments of Shallenberger and Ormond seem to have fostered a "growing dislike" for Roberts amongst the Washington County captains,<sup>19</sup> no known primary evidence suggested that any member of the regiment was unhappy with the colonel following his appointments. However, a "growing dislike" of Colonel Roberts by Captain Acheson would soon develop, and in fact, David Acheson's statement, "As men I like them very well," is the last known positive statement from him concerning Colonel Richard P. Roberts.

The Battle of Antietam/Sharpsburg took place on 17 September 1862, just one week after the 140<sup>th</sup>'s arrival in Parkton and just twenty miles to the south.<sup>20</sup> The men of the 140<sup>th</sup> were aware of the close proximity of the Rebels, and they also understood the necessity of protecting the railroad line, which was a major

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<sup>17</sup> Stewart, *History*, 340.

<sup>18</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 32-33.

<sup>19</sup> Vaughan, "The Brand of Coward," 226-227.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

artery in the movement of troops and supplies to the front. As such, the 140<sup>th</sup> took training seriously and performed guard duties diligently. The companies, being so widely separated, often acted independently, while regimental officers such as Roberts and Fraser made weekly quality control visits to the different encampments.<sup>21</sup>

Roberts seems to have performed his duties admirably during September and October 1862. No one complained when, for security reasons, he barred all camp access to civilian peddlers, although doing so made it more difficult for the men to buy “homemade” foods.<sup>22</sup> He also made the men of Company H happy by solving a problem with their cooks.<sup>23</sup> Further, he impressed the men by visiting them often. For example, James Mitchell of Company H recorded that the colonel visited him and his messmates once in September and on three separate occasions while they were sick in October, and then once when they were well again late in the month.<sup>24</sup> They also appreciated that the colonel took their side against the landlady in whose house they had stayed during their illness:

“Landlady very anxious to get us away. Col. thinks she had better keep quiet or he will take all her house.”<sup>25</sup> He oversaw a successful election on 14 October in which his men voted via absentee ballot in the Pennsylvania state elections, a vote that went without incident even though the regiment’s population included

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<sup>21</sup> Stewart, *History*, 293.

<sup>22</sup> Vaughan, “The Brand of Coward,” 245.

<sup>23</sup> Florida DAR, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell*, 7-8.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-21.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

men of strong convictions from both parties.<sup>26</sup> And, when the election of officers in Company H was held, and “[e]xcitement got very high,” the colonel wisely postponed the election for a few days until the situation calmed down enough that the election was held without incident.<sup>27</sup> Finally, at the end of October, J. Milton Ray of Company C noted that “[t]he Col. sent Thomas Noble<sup>28</sup> up in person days ago to see what all we wanted to make us comfortable.”<sup>29</sup> Clearly Roberts concerned himself with the best interests of his men, and his men appreciated his efforts.

Many soldiers underscored this situation in letters sent home in September and October. They do not seem to have censored their opinions in any way. In fact, in the history of the regiment, Stewart went as far as to say that “[t]he right to kick and criticize was the peculiar privilege of the private soldier and not to be interfered with.”<sup>30</sup> The chaplain, Reverend Marcus Ormond, who seems to have gotten off to a bad start with the regiment, was the object of the worst criticism. Besides David Acheson’s statement that he was “totally unfit for service of any kind whatsoever,”<sup>31</sup> Mitchell in his diary wrote that a messmate refused to attend Ormond’s prayer meetings because he “[d]on’t like the old chap.”<sup>32</sup> And, Sandie Acheson complained about Ormond’s “long prosy”

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<sup>26</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 29; J. Milton Ray, Parkton, Maryland, to his sister, Typescript, 16 October 1862, Allegheny County Soldiers and Sailors Memorial, Pittsburgh (Hereafter cited by last name, location and date).

<sup>27</sup> Florida DAR, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell*, 19-21.

<sup>28</sup> regimental quartermaster sergeant

<sup>29</sup> Ray, Parkton, Maryland, 30 October 1862.

<sup>30</sup> Stewart, *History*, 340.

<sup>31</sup> Vaughan, “The Brand of Coward,” 227.

<sup>32</sup> Florida DAR, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell*, 6.

sermons.<sup>33</sup> These opinions seem to have been widely held, for Ormond, despite his best efforts, failed to attract a substantial congregation.<sup>34</sup>

Other officers received criticism as well. For example Joseph Smith Graham of Company K, in a letter to his grandfather, praised all of the officers but his captain:

I like all of our offissers very well, all but the Captain and I don't like him very well. He is not the man I thought he was when I enlisted with him. If he gets plenty to eat I don't believe he cares whether the rest gets anything or not. There is not very many in the company that does like him but as for the rest of the offisscers I like them very well. They both act the gentleman and when we are not on drill they act just like the private. Our Captain hardly ever speaks to the private at all and when he is drilling us he looks as surly as a dog.<sup>35</sup>

But, during these months, the men of the 140<sup>th</sup> said nothing negative about the regimental officers. In this regard, J. Milton Ray seems to have best summed up the opinion of the regiment when he wrote, "I must say we have the nicest men for officers I ever saw. They are perfect gentlemen and don't rest till they see their men well cared for."<sup>36</sup>

And yet, by October, a hint of something negative had developed in Captain Acheson's opinion of Roberts. On 12 October 1862, Captain Acheson gave his father the first indication that he did not agree with his colonel, and further off-handedly asked his father not to do the colonel any favors:

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<sup>33</sup> Fulcher, *Family Letters*, 361.

<sup>34</sup> Vaughan, "The Brand of Coward," 227.

<sup>35</sup> Graham to his grandfather, 30 October 1862, in Janice Bartlett Reeder McFadden, *Aunt and the Soldier Boys from Cross Creek Village, Pennsylvania, 1856-1866* (Santa Cruz, California: Moore Graphic Arts, 1965), 45 (Hereafter cited as McFadden, *Aunt and the Soldier Boys*, followed by a page number); the captain referred to is Captain Stockton of Company K.

<sup>36</sup> Ray, Parkton, Maryland, 10 September 1862.

Col. Roberts went to Harrisburg yesterday to see if we could have the regt. moved there. He remarked to me yesterday that if he could get Mr. Mckennan, Mr. Lawrence, and yourself there to assist him he had no doubt it might be accomplished. I hope we may be moved from here, but to go into a garrison at Harrisburg is not at all to my taste.<sup>37</sup>

What exactly sparked this hint of discontent is unknown. Maybe it was nothing more than is mentioned, a disagreement as to the desired location of the regiment. Obviously moving to Harrisburg would be moving further away from the front, but not that much further. Could it be that Acheson was beginning to question the colonel's resolve to engage the enemy? In any case, this minor and back-handed remark is the first indication that Captain Acheson was not above questioning his colonel. It also established a foundation for a later, much more openly derisive letter home.

In this letter, dated 6 November 1862, David Acheson wrote:

I took dinner with the Col. last Tuesday. While discoursing upon the state of the country &c, he said that he believed there never would be a reunion of the States--that the foundations of society were broken up—that propositions for peace from the North or the South would be gladly received. I asked him if he anticipated anything in this war like the confusion or terror of the French Revolution. "The country," says he, "is ripe for it. The people are dissatisfied. We cannot hold out another year." . . . I would not have known that I said so but I verily believe that Col. Roberts is the "wrong man in the wrong place." Col. Fraser is his superior in everything that constitutes a soldier and should an opportunity offer itself will take the Col.'s place.<sup>38</sup>

In examining the contents of this letter, it is difficult to reconcile its contents with the aforementioned, patriotic letter Roberts wrote to his friend on 11 March 1861.

That said, it is important to remember that the only surviving account of this

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<sup>37</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 28.

<sup>38</sup> Fulcher, *Family Letters*, 360; Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 31-32.

dinner conversation is provided by Acheson, Roberts having left nothing behind to defend himself in this matter. If it is necessary to accept the transcript as truth, then Roberts's previous words and actions, already detailed, as well as future words and actions that will later be described, suggest that Acheson caught Roberts in a moment of weakness. Roberts seemingly liked and respected Acheson, or he would not have opened up to him the way he did. Acheson, for his part, might have taken the conversation one of two ways: he could have recognized and felt honored by the fact that the colonel valued his company enough to share his insecurities about the war with him, or he could have used the words to fuel the fire of doubt that was apparently previously ignited in his mind. Of these two choices, Acheson chose the latter.

That said, turning to the actual content of the conversation, and ignoring for a moment the end of the letter when Acheson passed judgment on Roberts's character, all that Roberts said is that he doubted if the country would ever be made whole again, and that he worried about a revolt tantamount to the French Revolution. In November 1862, these were real and valid concerns. The South was winning the war. Roberts said nothing to make Acheson question Roberts's patriotism or resolve to defend the country at all costs. And yet, by simply voicing his legitimate concerns, Roberts condemned himself in the mind of Acheson, a young, energetic student full of the "exuberance" and "indiscretion of youth" to which Stewart referred. Acheson simply did not like what Roberts said and could not, in his young, ideologically fervent mind, consider that the Union might actually lose the war, especially not with himself and men like him in the

army. His only recourse then was to conclude that Roberts was weak and therefore “the wrong man” for the job. And not surprisingly, the right man was a man of letters, like himself, and a Washington County man. In his dissertation, “The Brand of Coward,” Vaughan agreed when he suggested that Roberts’s mistake was not his uncertainty but was voicing his uncertainty to the young captain.<sup>39</sup> As a superior officer, Roberts made the mistake of showing weakness to a subordinate.

Almost certainly Captain Acheson went back to camp and told his brother and his brother’s messmates about the conversation he had with Roberts, for J. Milton Ray, a sergeant of Company C and a messmate of Sandie, soon chimed in with his own negative comment about the colonel: “I don’t think our ‘Col.’ cares much about training if he can get good winter quarters for himself and the four companies that are still in camp.”<sup>40</sup> This quote stands in stark contrast to the statements made by Ray in the previous two months in which he praised Roberts for his unselfishness. Although a heavy snowfall probably led Roberts to cancel drill in this instance, thus drawing Ray’s unwarranted ire, most likely Ray was influenced by Acheson into now criticizing his colonel.<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, Acheson apparently had little immediate influence on his brother Sandie, whose letters to his mother gave no hint of negative attitudes towards the colonel. In fact, in November, Sandie complimented the colonel twice, once for giving a good speech at a flag presentation ceremony and once

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<sup>39</sup> Vaughan, “The Brand of Coward,” 230.

<sup>40</sup> Ray, Parkton, Maryland, 9 November 1862.

<sup>41</sup> Florida DAR, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell*, 25.

for devising “a new method of guarding the Rail Road.”<sup>42</sup> Concerning the flag presentation ceremony, the *Beaver Argus* agreed with Sandie and deemed the speech delivered by Roberts as both “able and eloquent.”<sup>43</sup>

In the month of November and the first half of December, the regiment spent the majority of its time drilling and guarding the railroad. It was also inspected regularly by regimental officers. Although criticism of company leaders occurred frequently during this time period,<sup>44</sup> Roberts received virtually none. The most important conflict arose over the denial of two leave requests, with James Mitchell and John Paxton both complaining that Roberts had denied them leave. As a result, Paxton “went off cursing Roberts black and blue,”<sup>45</sup> while Mitchell understood why Roberts denied him leave: “He had not the authority so the thing is out.”<sup>46</sup>

In the first week of December 1862, the Army of Northern Virginia retreated back to Virginia, thus making the guarding of the railroad unnecessary. The 140<sup>th</sup> regiment was then ordered to the front.<sup>47</sup> In a letter dated 7 December 1862, Samuel Potter told the story:

Our Capt just now rece'd a dispatch from Col. Roberts. I heard it read. It read as follows Capt A T Gregg You will be in camp early tomorrow morning, with your Company, all your accoutrements and camp eqpage. And two days cooked rations, ready to start for Washington City at noon<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 34-37.

<sup>43</sup> *Beaver Argus*, Volume 38, Number 49, 3 December 1862, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Potter, Parkton, Maryland, 16 November 1862; Florida DAR, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell*, 29.

<sup>45</sup> Paxton, *Sword and Gown*, 363.

<sup>46</sup> Florida DAR, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell*, 29-30.

<sup>47</sup> Bates, *History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 407.

<sup>48</sup> Potter, Parkton, Maryland, 7 December 1862.

Much to the disappointment of the men, lack of coordination delayed this move. Ultimately, on 11 December the different companies said goodbye to their individual encampments and met at Parkton Station, where they boarded a train for Baltimore.<sup>49</sup> Many of the men managed to get their hands on some alcohol prior to the trip, and the train ride, possibly unbeknownst to the regimental officers, became an excuse for a party. In his diary, James Mitchell of Company H noted: "Quite a number of the Regt. drunk. Lost one man out of Co. A between this and Parkton. He was drunk and fell off the train. Never heard of him since."<sup>50</sup> The regiment then proceeded by way of Washington D.C. and Aquia Creek<sup>51</sup> to Falmouth, Virginia, just opposite the Rappahannock River from Fredericksburg, where they arrived on the evening of 20 December 1862, just after the Battle of Fredericksburg.<sup>52</sup> Here, they went into winter camp with the rest of the Army of the Potomac.<sup>53</sup> Samuel Potter of Company E wrote home the next day to express his amazement of seeing the camp at Falmouth: "The whole country for about 15 miles round is white with tents."<sup>54</sup> The secluded encampments along the Northern Central railroad line were just a distant memory now for the men of the 140<sup>th</sup>.

Roberts seems to have performed his duties admirably in Parkton. With the exception of Captain Acheson and Sergeant Ray, his men gave him favorable reports. With Captain Acheson, Roberts made a classic management

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 9 December 1862.

<sup>50</sup> Florida DAR, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell*, 37.

<sup>51</sup> Bates, *History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 407.

<sup>52</sup> Potter, near Falmouth, Virginia, 21 December 1862.

<sup>53</sup> Bates, *History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 407.

<sup>54</sup> Potter, near Falmouth, Virginia, 21 December 1862.

mistake: he took Acheson into his confidence and in doing so, displayed weakness to a subordinate. It remains to be seen how Roberts matured as a leader, and it will also be of interest to see if Acheson recognized Roberts's admission of doubt for what it was, a moment of weakness, or if he allowed it to cloud his future judgments of the colonel.

### CHAPTER THREE: Camp Life near Falmouth, Virginia

In camp near Falmouth, Virginia, of interest is how the relationship of Roberts with his men developed as the opinions of the men concerning Roberts's abilities and character were molded and cemented. Also of interest is how Colonel Roberts and his men measured up in comparison to other regiments that had had the benefit not only of battle experience but of professional training and drilling by experienced military men. This chapter will address these issues and will also demonstrate how and where the 140<sup>th</sup> fit into the grand scheme of the Army of the Potomac and its commanders, a position that would play an important role in the participation of the regiment in future battles.

Colonel Samuel Kosciuszko Zook was given temporary command of the Third Brigade of Hancock's First Division of Couch's Second Corps in October 1862. In December, he led his new brigade on a futile charge up Marye's Heights at the Battle of Fredericksburg. On that charge, Zook's brigade lost over 500 men in minutes.<sup>1</sup> Of the battle, Zook wrote to a friend, "I took my brigade into action 2000 strong & have left now 700. Comment is useless."<sup>2</sup> Now back in winter camp near Falmouth, Virginia and nursing its recent wounds, the Third Brigade was replenished when, on 20 December 1862, the Pennsylvania 140<sup>th</sup> arrived in camp and was assigned to its depleted ranks.<sup>3</sup> According to Sandie Acheson, the 140<sup>th</sup> at that time numbered 970 men, making it as large as many

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<sup>1</sup> Bradley M. Gottfried, *Brigades of Gettysburg: The Union and Confederate Brigades at the Battle of Gettysburg* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 2002), 121-122.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel K. Zook, Falmouth, Virginia, to E. J. Made, 16 December 1862, Bradley Eide Collection, Privately held; officially, Zook's brigade lost 491 enlisted men out of 1440 engaged and 54 officers out of 92 engaged.

<sup>3</sup> Stewart, *History*, 361.

brigades that were camped near Falmouth at that time.<sup>4</sup> Of the composition and overall size of the brigade, Sandie wrote: “Our brigade consists of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Del., 52<sup>nd</sup> N.Y., 27<sup>th</sup> Conn. and the 140<sup>th</sup> P.V., the 140<sup>th</sup> being about one half.”<sup>5</sup>

The men of the 140<sup>th</sup> were happy to join the rest of the army and to be brigaded, and letters flooded home to inform friends and family of their new assignment. Being in camp with the army was so much more interesting and exciting than guarding the railroad in Maryland, for in Falmouth, the men could actually look across the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg and at the enemy moving around on the opposite bank. They also heard first hand the stories of the battle, details of which also filled their letters home.

As soon as the men arrived, before they could even finish building winter quarters, drilling and picket duty began. In fact, just four days after its arrival in camp, the 140<sup>th</sup> took part in a review that was attended by Generals Burnside, Sumner and Hancock, as well as Colonel Zook.<sup>6</sup> Deficiencies in the performance of the regiment apparently upset someone, because on 26 December Sergeant James Mitchell recorded in his diary that “[t]he Sergeants had to go a mile from here to be drilled by a regular officer. Then they have the company to drill in squads. Will have this to do from day to day till we are well drilled.”<sup>7</sup> However, Colonel Zook must have seen at least some potential in the regiment, for on 30 December Sergeant J. Milton Ray of Company C wrote: “Col. Zook came out to see us and drilled us a while. After drill, he remarked that with a little practice

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<sup>4</sup> Gambone, *The Life of General Samuel K. Zook*, 139.

<sup>5</sup> Fulcher, *Family Letters*, 405.

<sup>6</sup> Florida DAR, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell*, 43.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

and perseverance that we would make one of the best regiments in the Army of the Potomac.”<sup>8</sup>

Colonel Richard Roberts certainly understood the responsibility and burden of commanding a regiment at the front.<sup>9</sup> In camp near Falmouth, this responsibility must have weighed heavily on him, for as much as he had drilled and trained his regiment while in Parkton, the regiment was not proficiently skilled in military maneuvers. This deficiency in skill should not be blamed only on Roberts. The regimental officers held positions of command but had received little to no proper training. A. G. White assessed the situation simply but accurately when he stated that “the regimental officers were greener than the rank and file.”<sup>10</sup> But, this was not unique to the 140<sup>th</sup>. In fact, Bell Wiley, in his book, *The Life of Billy Yank*, stated, “As a general rule, officers and men started out together in equal ignorance and blundered along with inadequate equipment through varying periods of training.”<sup>11</sup> Zook’s statement, that “with a little practice and perseverance” the 140<sup>th</sup> could develop into a great regiment, might have suggested that Roberts did a solid job in Parkton. However, determined to see it excel, his regiment’s lack of preparedness surely disappointed Roberts.

Unfortunately, the Christmas holiday season briefly delayed further preparation. The 140<sup>th</sup> arrived in camp just before Christmas and New Year’s, and these holidays, combined with the excitement of the move and the new

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<sup>8</sup> Ray, Falmouth, Virginia, 30 December 1862.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Roberts, near Falmouth, Virginia, to his daughter Emma Roberts, Beaver County, Pennsylvania, 15 December 1862, Richard Temple Collection, Privately held (Hereafter cited by last name, location and date).

<sup>10</sup> A. G. White, *History of Company F, 140<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers* (Greenville, Pennsylvania: Beaver Printing Company, 1973), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank*, 26.

surroundings, worked to make the men of the regiment a largely unruly bunch. Although Roberts himself was a gentleman of “sobriety,”<sup>12</sup> many of his men were not, and with the liquor flowing freely over the holidays, Roberts seems to have lost control of his men, at least for a day. On 5 January, Joseph Appleton of Company F described what happened to Roberts on New Year’s Day, 1863:

About one third of our regiment was drunk New Years day. They made some noise and the Colonel came over to stop it. But the boys made him get to his quarters and stay there. If they had caught him he would have been rough handled. They called him everything they could think of. The boys don’t like him a bit. He says “Dear, oh dear, I never saw such men.” “they called me a damn son -----.” They had a big time, but I could not see any fun in it.<sup>13</sup>

Whether Colonel Roberts let this act of insubordination slide because of the holiday, or whether he was really caught off guard, Roberts demonstrated weakness. He would, however, have future altercations with intoxicated men, and he would not be chased off again. He seemingly learned a great lesson about command on New Year’s Day.

On 2 January 1863, camp life returned to normal, as the seemingly endless drilling began again. Regarding these drills, Joseph Appleton wrote, “we drill everyday,”<sup>14</sup> and Sandie Acheson complained, “[we] don’t have much time to do anything else. . . .”<sup>15</sup> An early January review, overseen by General

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<sup>12</sup> *Beaver Argus*, Volume 38, Number 40, 1 October 1862, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Appleton, near Falmouth, Virginia, letters to his wife and family, 5 January 1863, Timothy Brookes Collection, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania (Hereafter cited by last name, location and date).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 January 1863.

<sup>15</sup> Fulcher, *Family Letters*, 405.

Winfield Scott Hancock, led to even more drilling.<sup>16</sup> J. R. Mitchell wrote in his diary, “Hancock recommended that we drill more,”<sup>17</sup> but he also agreed with Hancock’s prescription by stating that “drilling [is] a thing greatly needed by both officers & men.”<sup>18</sup>

Apparently during this review Colonel Zook happened to notice that the companies of the 140<sup>th</sup> regiment were not aligned in the proper order. Standard military procedure at the time required a regiment to align by company in order of the seniority of commission of the captains of the companies. Apparently no one in the 140<sup>th</sup> had known of this requirement, and subsequently, when the 140<sup>th</sup> arrived in Parkton, Maryland, the captains drew lots to decide the order of alignment. By 5 January, Roberts found out that the order of the companies of his regiment was improper, and he endeavored immediately to change the order, based on captain seniority. This seemingly minor issue mattered greatly to one officer, Captain David Acheson. The possibility of having his company’s position changed angered him immensely, and unsurprisingly, he took his anger out on Colonel Roberts. Acheson confided in his diary: “Yesterday [7 January] Col. wished to change letters of cos. in regt. Opposed by seven capt. of regt.—went to Col.’s tent to remonstrate. He will see Col. Zook, comdg. Brig. today.”<sup>19</sup> Four days later he wrote his father such a scathing letter that it merits being quoted verbatim:

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<sup>16</sup> Ray, near Falmouth, Virginia, 5 January 1863.

<sup>17</sup> J. R. Mitchell, diary, 5 January 1863, Mitchell Collection, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania (Hereafter cited by last name and date).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 January 1863.

<sup>19</sup> Fulcher, *Family Letters*, 387.

Camp near Falmouth  
January 11, 1863

Dear Father,

It is but a short time since I wrote home. All remains in status quo. I have heretofore avoided the relation of any grievances or disagreeable circumstances connected with our regt. I do not like complaints nor would I have what I am going to say made public, but from the time of the formation of the regt., I have had a growing dislike to our Col. Nor am I alone in this. Six other capt. beside myself detest him as cordially as I do. Roberts has been too much elevated by his promotion. He has treated all other capt. than those from Beaver Co. with cold indifference. Lt. Col. Fraser, a man who deserves the esteem of every man in the regt., has been treated shamefully, never been consulted in regard to anything that concerned the regt.—has had a great part of the labor to perform without receiving any credit for it. Fraser is a gentleman and tactician. Roberts is a fool and knows nothing about military affairs. At times, I can hardly restrain an expression of contempt for him while in his presence.

He has attempted to flatter me at times by complimenting me for the manner in which I governed my co.—telling me I was the best officer in the regt. I might have believed him had I not known that he told other capt. the same.

Poor old Parker is completely fooled. He plays the man Friday to Roberts and has cut loose from the other Wash. Co. capt. The Col. told him that he lost the majorcy by one vote, and that had he (the Col.) known him as well at the time of election as now, he would have secured to him that position. Ever since, the poor old man has been boasting of his popularity and his prospects of promotion. I have avoided any collision with the capt. as long as it was possible, but as our commissions have the same date, there was room for misunderstanding.

The other day when upon brigade hill, Parker's co. and my own happened in the same division of which I took the command, much against the capt.'s will. Col. Zook coming past us noticed that Parker was not in his place and sent him to it. This was the commencement of a difficulty which is likely to cause some trouble. Col. Zook has ordered the cos. to take position according to seniority of commission which change would place my co. in the first position.

But we entered into an agreement at Parkton to decide the seniority by lot and some of us feel that it would be dishonorable and unjust to take away the positions of honor from those who now have them. Seven of us went to the Col.'s tent a few evenings ago and stated our desire that no change should be made and our

satisfaction in our present conditions, but the ignoramus is determined to push the matter through. He had better beware or he will have such noise about his ears presently as will make him feel his littleness. Wash. Co. has five cos. in the regt. Green, one, and Mercer, one—all of which, with the exception of Parker, stand as a unit. If we cannot have a fair shake, we can at least make his nest very warm.

I was out on picket yesterday with about 90 men from different cos. The weather was very unpleasant—rain pouring down for twelve hours without intermission—a cold wind blowing—this was soldiering. Sandy, Uncle John, and other friends are well.

Your son,  
David

Were you acquainted with Roberts as a lawyer? I should like to know something of his antecedents. If he was as successful in the practice of his profession as I am told by his friends he was, I do think he made a great mistake when he entered upon a military career.

David<sup>20</sup>

Regardless of what exactly caused this outburst, Captain Acheson had acknowledged a 'growing dislike' for the colonel since "the time of the formation" of the regiment.

Whether his assertion that the other captains also "detest" him is true or not is unknown, but there is no other primary evidence that survives that suggests that this is true or false. Nor is there any other evidence that supports Acheson's assertion that Roberts was prejudiced towards the captains of Beaver County. The charge that Lieutenant Colonel Fraser was treated "shamefully" by Roberts is unsupported by existing evidence. Fraser long outlived the war, and commented on his involvement in the war extensively, and never said anything negative about the way in which he was treated by Roberts. Certainly Roberts and the rest of the regiment knew little of military affairs prior to joining the

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<sup>20</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 47-48; Fulcher, *Family Letters*, 364-365.

service. No one in the regiment, for example, knew even a single regulation about the placement of companies. A reasonable officer would have instantly acknowledged the appropriateness and necessity of the change. Given that Colonel Zook, in Acheson's own admission, also recognized the error, Acheson had no reasonable grounds to call Roberts an "ignoramus." This whole affair reveals Acheson's hot-headedness and immaturity far more than Roberts's incompetence.

The situation could have proven ugly but was defused before it had the opportunity to escalate. Zook, after conferring with Roberts, simply ordered Roberts and the captains to "regularize their operations." At this order, the captains complied without further argument.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps this entire episode mattered only to Captain Acheson. Not even Sandie or his verbose messmate J. Milton Ray seemed to have left any mention of it. Roberts himself obviously did not consider it a major problem, for in mid-January he calmly reported, "I am kept very busy, almost day and night, it is a great deal of labour to manage a regiment."<sup>22</sup> In fact, a soldier found him "in a good humor from a cause unknown to privates."<sup>23</sup> All of this suggests that the repositioning of the companies in the 140<sup>th</sup> regiment was only a major issue for Captain Acheson and that his anger associated with this repositioning was based on the "growing dislike" he had for the colonel, which in itself seems more and more based on county allegiance instead of actual merit.

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<sup>21</sup> Vaughan, "The Brand of Coward," 321.

<sup>22</sup> Roberts, near Falmouth, Virginia, 15 January 1863.

<sup>23</sup> Mitchell, 9 January 1863.

David Acheson once again demonstrated his allegiance to his home county by his behavior regarding the case of Lieutenant James Mannon of Company D of Washington County, who was dishonorably discharged from the regiment on 16 January 1863. Even though Mannon broke the rules and thereby earned a dishonorable discharge, Acheson not only semi-defended Mannon's actions but recorded his concern about the undeserved "spot" that such an action leaves upon the "escutcheon" of Washington County.<sup>24</sup>

In the midst of these January events, Colonel Roberts wrote to his daughter Emma to explain why he was off fighting the war instead of home with her. His letter demonstrates why he joined the army, but more importantly, the letter provides insight into Roberts's resolve about the war. Although only two months had passed since his conversation with Acheson, Roberts apparently had regained his faith in the Union cause. Roberts wrote:

My Dear do you understand why Pa left his home with all its comforts and the little daughter he loves so well. . . . it is because rebels are trying to destroy the government. and the Government is essential necessary to protect the people from harm. to save its property from harm, to save themselves from harm. If we had no Government we could not live in safety. thieves and murderers would take our property and our lives. To help to save this government Pa left his home and came here. that his little daughter and those he loves may have a government and laws to protect and defend them.<sup>25</sup>

It is easy to see that Roberts was a lawyer in the civilian world and that he placed great importance in the necessity of government and law in maintaining order.

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<sup>24</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 51.

<sup>25</sup> Roberts, near Falmouth, Virginia, 12 January 1863.

For Roberts, the Union and its government were “essential,” and in attempting to destroy them, the rebels tattered the very fabric of civilization. It is for this reason that he left his daughter and put his life on the line. Without law, what quality of life would there be?

Roberts was a man who believed in rules and in following the rules. Therefore, unsurprisingly when Roberts found out that the position of the companies in his regiment violated protocol, he immediately desired to rectify the error. It is further no shock that Roberts supported the discharge of Mannon, even though Roberts probably sympathized with him. Roberts put the law first and his personal feelings and emotions second. The law was extremely important to him, a fact that would be demonstrated again later on.

In the mean time and for the rest of the month, the 140<sup>th</sup> regiment was seemingly constantly being drilled and inspected and reviewed. On 12 January Samuel Potter wrote:

We have so much drilling &c to do now that I can scarcely get time to write a letter. We have company drill every forenoon. And Brigade drill from 1 P until 5 PM And Comp inspection and regt inspection every sunday morning and dress parade in the evening, And there is a grand review once or twice a week.<sup>26</sup>

Then on 17 January, the 140<sup>th</sup> took part in “a grand review” of the entire Second Corps. Describing this review, Sergeant James Mitchell of Company H made the following entry in his diary: “There was some 20 thousand troops, eight brigades (Couches corps) on review. It was a splendid sight. Gens. Burnsidés, Couch,

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<sup>26</sup> Potter, near Falmouth Virginia, 12 January 1863.

Sumner, Hancock and Zook reviewed us.”<sup>27</sup> Existing evidence, including the diary of J. R. Mitchell and letters by Sandie Acheson and Joseph Smith Graham, indicates that the 140<sup>th</sup> performed well, for not a single negative comment was recorded concerning its actions. Even General Hancock had nothing bad to say. This evidence suggests that, whether liked or not, Roberts was receiving his desired results.

The beginning of February saw Colonel Roberts in the position of acting brigadier, and in this capacity, he moved for some time to a headquarters “at an old sesh’s house a half mile from camp.”<sup>28</sup> On 6 February 1863, while stationed at Falmouth, Roberts wrote the assistant adjutant general and requested a fifteen day leave of absence for the purpose of attending to some “professional/legal and private business” matters. He also desired “to visit an aged parent who I am informed cannot long survive.” The request for leave was granted and Roberts absented himself from his regiment for fifteen days, from 11 February to 26 February.<sup>29</sup> Roberts was not the only man in the regiment to be awarded a furlough. According to a letter written by J. Milton Ray on 10 February 1863,

This has been a gladsome week to a number in our reg’t. The Col., two captains & five or six privates have got furloughs to go home for 10 days commencing with the day they start & until the day they return. Furloughs are only granted to those who have good reason for going home & then they must be well recommended by their officers.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Florida DAR, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell*, 49.

<sup>28</sup> Appleton, near Falmouth, Virginia, 1 February 1863.

<sup>29</sup> Temple, “Colonel Richard P. Roberts,” 4.

<sup>30</sup> Ray, near Falmouth, Virginia, 10 February 1863.

Colonel Zook also applied for and was granted a twenty day furlough, demonstrating that Roberts's request was not in any way inappropriate.<sup>31</sup>

After Colonel Roberts departed his regiment on 11 February,<sup>32</sup> the regiment suffered a series of problems. First, the major of the regiment, Thomas Rodgers of Mercer County, was arrested on the 12<sup>th</sup> for drunkenness and ordered to report to Washington.<sup>33</sup> A few days later, J. R. Mitchell reported that a battalion drill run by Lieutenant Colonel Fraser was "very unsatisfactory on the part of some of the Capts,"<sup>34</sup> a foreshadowing of a poor drill performance to come. Then, on the night of 22 February, over thirty men of Company F of Beaver County, including Captain Henry and three lieutenants, left the picket line without permission and, as a result, were placed under arrest. Although some of the men actually suffered frostbite on what was reportedly the coldest night of the war,<sup>35</sup> they did not have permission to leave their posts and deserved punishment, which in most instances included a "loss of pay" and a loss of "privileges and prerequisites."<sup>36</sup> Finally, the men of the regiment started arguing over politics, more precisely the performance of the Lincoln administration. Even though some men such as J. R. Mitchell dismissed critics of the current administration as "generally ignorant 'Breckenridge Democrats',"<sup>37</sup> others took their criticisms more seriously. In fact, politics and drill performance would

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<sup>31</sup> Gambone, *The Life of General Samuel K. Zook*, 142-151.

<sup>32</sup> David Scott, in a letter to his mother dated 13 February 1863, said that Roberts left from Beaver the morning of the 12<sup>th</sup>, not the 11<sup>th</sup> as reported in other sources.

<sup>33</sup> Florida DAR, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell*, 55.

<sup>34</sup> Mitchell, 21 February 1863.

<sup>35</sup> Stewart, *History*, 316

<sup>36</sup> Appleton, near Falmouth, Virginia, 1 March 1863; Vaughan, "The Brand of Coward," 319.

<sup>37</sup> Mitchell, 24 February 1863.

provide the biggest challenges to Roberts during the two months following his return to duty on 1 March 1863.<sup>38</sup>

For the men of the 140<sup>th</sup>, arguing over politics acted as one of the chief diversions against the monotony of camp life. In fact, many records left by the soldiers during March 1863 discussed political sentiments, both within the regiment and back at home. To understand what the men of the 140<sup>th</sup> were preoccupied with, it is important to know something of the political ideology both of the regiment and the counties represented by the regiment.

Two antiwar factions existed in Pennsylvania during the Civil War, both associated with the Democratic party: the “peace at any price” men who never numbered more than ten percent of the state’s voters and the “peace Democrats” or “Copperheads.” This latter and much larger group, which included “many small farmers, German and Irish immigrants, laborers, coal miners and factory workers,” in fact came close to electing a governor in 1863.<sup>39</sup> Statewide support for the Democratic party is evident in the state election results of both 1862 and 1863. On 14 October 1862, Pennsylvanians elected two Democratic candidates for state office. Further, in the state House of Representatives where every member was newly elected, the Democrats, who controlled the House by a margin of 51-32 in 1862,<sup>40</sup> scored an easy victory, 55 to 45. In the state Senate, the Unionists won eight out of twelve seats available, and both parties won

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<sup>38</sup> Temple stated that Roberts returned on 26 February 1863, but Roberts himself wrote to his daughter on 2 March saying that “I arrived here safely yesterday morning.” Joseph Appleton recorded having a conversation with Roberts on 1 March, but there is no mention of Roberts in the primary sources at the end of February. Therefore, the inclination is to accept Roberts’s testimony as fact.

<sup>39</sup> Shankman, *The Pennsylvania Antiwar Movement*, 14-18.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

twelve seats in the U. S. House of Representatives.<sup>41</sup> On 13 October 1863, Pennsylvanians re-elected Republican incumbent Governor Curtin over Democratic challenger Woodward by a margin of fewer than 16,000 votes out of over 500,000 votes cast.<sup>42</sup>

Among the counties represented by the Pennsylvania 140<sup>th</sup> regiment, Greene County was a center of peace, and by extension, Democratic, sentiment.<sup>43</sup> Beaver County, on the other hand, was a Republican stronghold. The other two counties, Mercer and Washington, were fairly mixed. Of these counties, Governor Curtin won 60% of the vote in Beaver County, 53% of the vote in Mercer County, 51% of the vote in Washington County and just 33% of the vote in Greene County.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, in the 1864 presidential election in which Republican incumbent Lincoln faced the Democrat General George McClellan, Lincoln won 57% of the vote in Beaver County, 53% in Mercer County, 51% in Washington County and just 33% in Greene County.<sup>45</sup>

In his book, *The Pennsylvania Antiwar Movement, 1861-1865*, Arnold Shankman detailed several examples of antiwar sentiment that occurred in these counties in 1863:

In Washington County members of antiwar organizations were supposedly active in six townships, and the provost marshal called for troops after someone shot at enrollers serving notices on draftees. One enroller in Greene County reported that a group of men threatened to hang him. When he returned from Pittsburgh, accompanied by twenty-three soldiers, the ringleaders fled to Virginia. After he arrested five deserters, he encountered no more

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<sup>41</sup> Bradley, *The triumph of militant Republicanism*, 157-158.

<sup>42</sup> Shankman, *The Pennsylvania Antiwar Movement*, 134-137.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-18.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-137.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 199-202.

trouble. Many of Mercer County's 900 draftees spoke about resisting the conscription law, but most later changed their minds and found a substitute or paid the \$300 commutation fee.<sup>46</sup>

But, while sentiment was not so sure at home, in the army the vast majority of Union soldiers, at least in 1862, were pro-war and by extension supporters of the Republican ticket. According to the *Beaver Argus*, in the 1862 election, Beaver county soldiers voted almost unanimously Republican.<sup>47</sup> On 13 October 1862, David Acheson of Company C wrote, "We held an election yesterday . . . it shows the sentiment of the Co. The republican ticket was elected (as far as our co. goes) by a large majority."<sup>48</sup> The next day, Samuel Potter of Company E wrote, "This is election day. our men are voting now, I must go and attend to the interests of the Republican ticket."<sup>49</sup> Then on 16 October, J. Milton Ray reported, "We have a few Democrats in our company but we carried the election by a large majority."<sup>50</sup> Finally, although the following regimental results of the 1864 presidential election are outside the scope of this work, they do fairly accurately demonstrate the political sentiment of the individual companies within the regiment:

Returns of the Election in the 140<sup>th</sup> P. V.

	Lincoln	McClellan
Co. A	7	24
Co. B	18	0
Co. C	18	8
Co. D	11	3
Cos. E & G	19	6

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>47</sup> *Beaver Argus*, Volume 38, Number 43, 22 October 1862, 2.

<sup>48</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 29.

<sup>49</sup> Potter, near Parkton, Maryland, 14 October 1862.

<sup>50</sup> Ray, Parkton, Maryland, 16 October 1862.

Co. F	4	7
Co. H	27	7
Co. I	19	4
Co. K	20	0 <sup>51</sup>

Of interest in these results is the wide margin by which McClellan won the election held by Company A.<sup>52</sup>

This background information makes the events and the resulting conflicts of March 1863 somewhat easier to understand. Emotions over political sentiment ran high in the month of March. Unfortunately, no political views from the presumably Democratic Company A of Greene County have surfaced.<sup>53</sup> Neither have any from Company B of Mercer County, but the rest of the regiment is well represented. Their comments paint a clear picture of the overall sentiments of the regiment.

On 3 March 1863, Joseph Moody of Company H wrote of Democrats, “I would like to lend a helping hand with the Tar & feathers.”<sup>54</sup> Joseph Appleton of Company F wrote on 5 March that Breckenridge Democrats “are all sesh, every one of them, and a curse to the army and a disgrace to the north.”<sup>55</sup> On 15 March, J. Milton Ray wrote, “You should hear a soldier’s talk of the peace party. They scorn them.”<sup>56</sup> Then on 23 March Appleton wrote again to say,

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<sup>51</sup> McFadden, *Aunt and the Soldier Boys*, 153.

<sup>52</sup> Note that the results of Companies F and C are probably skewed by the depletion of these companies at the Battle of Gettysburg.

<sup>53</sup> Of these primary sources, the surviving letters of Harrison Anderson are the most extensive, but they say nothing of politics. Harrison Anderson, letters, 20 February 1863 to 28 April 1865, to his family, John Mort Collection, Privately held.

<sup>54</sup> Joseph Moody, near Falmouth, Virginia, to Martha Winthrow, Hookstown, Beaver County, Pennsylvania, 3 March 1863, Lewis Leigh Collection, Book 2, 61, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania (Hereafter cited by last name, location and date).

<sup>55</sup> Appleton, near Falmouth, Virginia, 5 March 1863.

<sup>56</sup> Ray, near Falmouth, Virginia, 15 March 1863.

But some of the letters that have been coming here from friends at home (the copper head class) has done more harm than all the sickness in the army. The copper heads write all sorts of discouraging stuff to their friends here. Six of them in Company A of our regiment have shot off the finger of their right hands off.<sup>57</sup>

Sandie Acheson of Company C wrote on 24 March:

Every soldier in the 140<sup>th</sup> hates the name 'Copperhead.' I said every; but there are a few who came into the army through other motives than patriotism, that are favorable to the views and actions of these 'Peace men.' These few are some that you know. They have been caught talking across the river before now, and from what they have said, it had generally been thought they would as leave be over there as here.<sup>58</sup>

An unknown member of the 140<sup>th</sup> wrote to the *Beaver Argus* concerning the Copperheads, calling them "sneaking, cowardly traitors."<sup>59</sup> Even Colonel Roberts made his viewpoint known when he wrote the *Argus* and said: "I observe there are still some 'copperheads' who endeavor to thwart the Government in every effort to save itself from death. It would be well for the sneaking cowards and tories to take heed and be admonished by the signs of the times."<sup>60</sup>

Although all these authors despised the "Copperheads," many of them also knew some within the regiment. Further, the fact that Appleton specifically identified Company A as a company sympathetic towards Democrats substantiates the evidence provided by the voting records in proving its sympathies. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that, although the majority of the men of the 140<sup>th</sup> were Republicans, both political parties were well represented

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<sup>57</sup> Appleton, near Falmouth, Virginia, 23 March 1863.

<sup>58</sup> Fulcher, *Family Letters*, 414.

<sup>59</sup> *Beaver Argus*, Volume 39, Number 12, 25 March 1863, 2.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, Number 13, 1 April 1863, 2.

within the regiment. This fact became important at the end of the month when the Republicans of the 140<sup>th</sup> pushed for the writing of a series of pro-war resolutions that, according to David Acheson, would be “condemnatory of the course of the copperheads.”<sup>61</sup>

Despite all of this political upheaval within the regiment, training went on as usual. During this month, General Hancock again began criticizing the performance of the regiment, and the men of the 140<sup>th</sup> did not appreciate his criticisms. Anger at Hancock led Joseph Appleton, for the second and final time, to criticize Colonel Roberts. Apparently unaware of the significance of chain of command, he criticized Roberts for not standing up to General Hancock:

It is said the Colonel is a little too weak in the knees to take his regiments part. He lets old Gen Hancock called them damn militia to his face and the boys don't like it. Old Hancock is a regular and a perfect son ----- . The Irish Brigade has shot at him three times and they swear they will get him yet. He is an old tyrant and the colonel won't talk up to him. However the lieut. colonel is not afraid of him.<sup>62</sup>

Roberts, a consummate adherer to rules, only followed proper military protocol in not talking back to his commanding officer. Furthermore, Appleton would have had no way of knowing if Roberts had defended his regiment privately with Hancock. Whether the lieutenant colonel feared Hancock or not made no difference. Perhaps Appleton had heard Fraser make some bold but meaningless claim about what he would have done if the general had said those things to him. Nonetheless, the event reflects Roberts's wisdom and even-temperedness instead of weakness.

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<sup>61</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 66.

<sup>62</sup> Appleton, near Falmouth, Virginia, 11 March 1863.

Although Roberts steered clear from trouble with Hancock, trouble still tracked him down. On 16 March, a member of Company A deserted, and as a result, the regiment lost all of its furloughs.<sup>63</sup> Then on 18 March, the regiment “[m]ade a poor show” in a battalion drill in the presence of division inspector Major George Scott of Hancock’s staff.<sup>64</sup> Of this performance, J. R. Mitchell wrote, “Twas surprising how poorly we performed but the general impression is that the fault of failure lay most with the Officers.”<sup>65</sup> Apparently the enlisted men blamed the officers, but in Captain David Acheson’s mind, the blame belonged entirely to Colonel Roberts, whom he maligned once again in a 24 March letter:

The 140<sup>th</sup>, I am sorry to say, is under disgrace owing to Col. Robert’s ignorance. Gen Hancock is very much down upon our regt. and has been putting us through inspections, drills, &c. The other [day] we were ordered out for an inspection for our efficiency in drill. A major who is on Hancock’s staff acted as inspector. The Lt. Col. not being present just at the time the regt. when out, the Col. was compelled to go out and show his ignorance, which he did most completely. He never was, nor will he ever be, able to drill a battalion. The inspecting officer gave in a bad report. The consequence is that all furloughs of officers and men have been stopped. An order to this effect has been read throughout the army.<sup>66</sup>

Of peculiar interest here is that Acheson blamed the loss of furloughs on the performance of the regiment, whereas, as already mentioned, another source noted that the regiment had already lost its furloughs for the desertion of a soldier

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<sup>63</sup> Florida DAR, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell*, 61; Vaughan, “The Brand of Coward,” 314.

<sup>64</sup> Gambone, *The Life of General Samuel K. Zook*, 153; Florida DAR, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell*, 63.

<sup>65</sup> Mitchell, 19 March 1863.

<sup>66</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 71; Fulcher, *Family Letters*, 373.

from Company A.<sup>67</sup> Although the regiment had performed poorly, no other soldier specifically blamed Colonel Roberts. When J. R. Mitchell, for example, suggested “the fault of the failure lay most with the Officers,” he just as well might have meant the captains of the various companies, including Acheson himself. If he had meant only Roberts, logically he would not have used the plural “Officers.” In fact, according to the diary of Wilson M. Paxton, the captains of the regiment were required to attend officer school starting 23 March,<sup>68</sup> which suggests some of their superiors believed they needed more training. Given that Acheson wrote his stinging attack one day later, he just might have been responding to the wounding of his personal pride as a result of being ordered to attend officer school. Even Acheson’s brother failed to support the accusations when he ignored the criticism of the drill but praised Colonel Roberts for criticizing a peace Democrat.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, quite possibly Captain David Acheson’s ever “growing dislike” for the colonel had clouded his judgment again, or at least provoked him to place undue blame on the colonel.

On 23 March 1863, Colonel Samuel K. Zook was promoted to general, an action he had been expecting and waiting for since December.<sup>70</sup> Soon after he became general, possibly empowered by the new star on his shoulder, Zook visited General Hancock and told him that “Scotty lied” and that the performance

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<sup>67</sup> In a letter home dated 12 April 1863, Sandie Acheson also blamed the loss of furloughs on the regiment’s poor performance during the 18 March inspection. It could be that the regiment was never actually told why it lost its furloughs, leaving individual soldiers to surmise the reason for the punishment.

<sup>68</sup> Wilson Paxton, diary, 23 March 1863, CW Misc. Collection, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania (Hereafter cited by last name and date).

<sup>69</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 70-71.

<sup>70</sup> Albert H. Wunsch III and Brian Green, “Ready to Die,” *Civil War Times Illustrated* 39, 6 (December 2000), 65.

of the 140<sup>th</sup> had pleased him, prompting Hancock to restore the privileges he had recently taken away.<sup>71</sup> This restoration of privileges gave the men faith in their brigade leader and also restored the pride that they believed they had lost after the last poorly graded inspection. Nonetheless, the men worked hard and were drilled every day, sometimes even by Zook himself. Several of the men reported that the regiment had improved significantly, culminating in a 1 April drill during which the “140th done finely” and “acquitted [itself] well.”<sup>72</sup> Interestingly, Captain David Acheson failed to report the good performance of his regiment or the colonel.

Another illustration of Colonel Roberts’s strict adherence to the rules involved interactions with Confederate pickets. General orders forbade fraternizing with the enemy, but this rule was difficult to enforce,<sup>73</sup> and so pickets of both armies would communicate, mostly for the purpose of trade.

Confederates longed for real coffee. Union soldiers coveted Southern tobacco. Soldiers even went as far as to make little model boats that they would load with goods and sail back and forth across the river. But, this trick did not work when Colonel Roberts commanded the pickets. If the rule permitted no fraternizing, he would allow none. Roberts explained:

I was sent out in command of the pickets. . . . We were close to the Rebels . . . . They sent over a nice little boat, a ship- with masts and sails. it had newspapers, some tobacco and a letter. They wanted papers and coffee in return. The writer said he didn’t want the boat

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<sup>71</sup> Gambone, *The Life of General Samuel K. Zook*, 153.

<sup>72</sup> Mitchell, 27 March 1863; McFadden, *Aunt and the Soldier Boys*, 76; Mitchell, 1 & 3 April 1863.

<sup>73</sup> Vaughan, “The Brand of Coward,” 312.

to fall into the hands of our officers, as they would take it away, and he wanted it to send over papers and tobacco again. I took the boat to headquarters- about twenty Rebels stood and watched me while I was examining it and carrying it off. I know they felt like sending a minnie ball after me.<sup>74</sup>

In fact, according to Joseph Appleton, neither side was happy with the interruption of this trade. Roberts knew his action disappointed the Union troops as much as the men across the river, but that did not keep him from doing his duty. Roberts also managed to anger some of his officers when General Hooker, who sought to reduce alcohol consumption by officers, ordered that whiskey would only be available by order of the colonel of each regiment. Roberts, as a man of sobriety, “don’t give any.” Obviously, officers complained, but Roberts had the authority to impose his will. The enlisted men were happy to see the same prohibition enforced on the officers that had supposedly been enforced on them for some time.<sup>75</sup>

However, Roberts’s strict adherence to military protocol did not draw the ire of Captain David Acheson. Instead, in the same letter in which he had complained about Roberts’s ignorance and his inability to drill a battalion, Acheson wrote:

The officers have tried several times to get up a meeting to pass resolutions condemning the course of the Peace Men at home. We have been unable to accomplish anything as yet. The [Col.], while pretending to favor the movement, kept it back. We will try again to do something.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Roberts, near Falmouth, Virginia, 28 March 1863.

<sup>75</sup> Appleton, near Falmouth, Virginia, 27 March 1863.

<sup>76</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 71; Fulcher, *Family Letters*, 373.

Whatever “kept it back” meant, Roberts did so for only a few days. Within four days a committee had been appointed to “draft resolutions expressive of the sentiments of the Hundred and Fortieth.”<sup>77</sup> Almost predictably, Acheson found fault with and blamed his favorite target:

At a meeting of the officers of the Regt. a committee consisting of Col. Roberts and three Cpts. was appointed to draw up [resolutions]. This was about two weeks ago. The committee, after putting the thing [off] from day to day, finally reported last Friday evening a set of miserable resolutions. These resolutions were to have been submitted to the companies and then to the regt. I sent them around my co. and a great majority of the men signed them. Some few who receive their teachings from the Examiner and Review refused to sign them.

I went to some of the Captains today to see what had been done in their companies but found that they had totally neglected them. This evening they were to have been submitted to the Regt. but it was not done. Had the wishes of the Wash. Co. officers been carried out, a set of resolutions worthy of the regt. would have [been] sent home weeks ago, but the Col. in whose hands the matter was placed neglected it as long as he could well do it.<sup>78</sup>

For the first time, Sandie Acheson agreed in writing with his brother:

Inside you will find a set of resolutions drawn up by our Col. (after three weeks' labor) and adopted by the line officers of the regt. They are, I understand, to be submitted to the companies. I have a notion not to comment on them, for by doing so, I might say something against my “superior,” but I will say that if, “after three weeks labor,” I could not get up a better set of resolutions, I would petition a court martial to condemn me to be drummed out of camp. He's drawn it up in “terms not to be misunderstood,” Oh! how “milk and water” like! How he tries to be as easy as he can for fear of offending the Copperheads! The first resolution is what will go to pen a series; but “turn about is fair play” and so the second is expressed in such language that the Review and co. could adopt it with as much grace as we could.

The third and last principal one begins beautifully—is written very well—shows throughout that care has been taken in the

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<sup>77</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 74.

<sup>78</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 74; Fulcher, *Family Letters*, 374.

construction of it, but take notice how it is wound up—“That we feel for them all the contempt that naturally springs from loyal hearts for sneaking cowards, tories, and traitors.” Oh hush! is this all that the “Hundred and fortieth”—the best regiment in the service of Uncle Sam, can say—and that too after “three weeks” labor? Truly Mons laborat et mus.” But perhaps it is better to have something done than nothing. It wouldn’t do to vote down these for fear that the Copperheads would misconstrue our actions, but they (resolutions) don’t express the views of the men of this regt. by—“a bag full.”

But I must “pull in the strings”—must let you look at them without being prejudiced. Understand that Co. Frazier is at work to get up some for the approval of the Washington Co. officers. We’ll wait patiently for their appearance. Hope they will be more to the point. Nothing more at present.<sup>79</sup>

The Achesons had a few details wrong. The drafting of the resolutions by a committee, chaired by Captain Gregg of Washington County, required five days, not “weeks.” The regiment, with only two negative votes, then approved the resolutions. Surely the resolutions came reasonably close to reflecting the men’s views. Perhaps the Achesons wanted stronger resolutions; most likely some soldier would have preferred weaker ones. Thus to garner maximum support, the resolutions likely reflected political realities. Furthermore, unless Roberts totally bullied the committee, the drafting of the resolutions was a collaboration by three officers. All this meant that the Acheson charges might have had some basis in fact but most probably did not.<sup>80</sup>

The month of April was one of little controversy. The regiment continued to perform well in drills and inspections, and even General Hancock was satisfied

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<sup>79</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 76-77.

<sup>80</sup> *Beaver Argus*, Volume 39, Number 15, 15 April 1863, 2; despite the reference by Sandie Acheson, there is no evidence that Lieutenant Colonel Fraser ever wrote a competing set of resolutions.

with the performance of the regiment.<sup>81</sup> On 13 April, General Zook was given formal command of the Third Brigade, which greatly pleased the members of the regiment.<sup>82</sup> On 15 April, Lieutenant Colonel Fraser returned from a fifteen day furlough.<sup>83</sup> This fact is noteworthy because, contrary to what David Acheson wrote, Colonel Roberts obviously was able to handle a drill well, including a review by President Lincoln himself. The fact that J. R. Mitchell wrote in his diary that, concerning the review, “We got along very well” and the generals “appeared well pleased with us,” is testimony to Roberts’s aptitude on the review field.<sup>84</sup>

In the middle of April, an argument took place between General Hancock and General Zook. The basis for the argument was General Hancock’s expressed desire to transfer the 140<sup>th</sup> regiment out of Zook’s Third Brigade. According to Sandie Acheson, Zook told Hancock that if Hancock “transferred the 140<sup>th</sup> he might take the whole d—n concern.”<sup>85</sup> Joseph Appleton of Company F also wrote about the encounter: “Old Hancock wanted to put us in another division, but Zook said no. Take any other two regiments, but I want the 140<sup>th</sup> and I won’t give it up. He is our brigadier and the regiment all think a lot of him.”<sup>86</sup> General Hancock backed off his plans, and the 140<sup>th</sup> stayed in the Third Brigade. Obviously Zook thought as highly of the regiment as the regiment thought of him, a fact that indirectly pays tribute to Colonel Roberts.

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<sup>81</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 78.

<sup>82</sup> Gambone, *The Life of General Samuel K. Zook*, 154.

<sup>83</sup> Paxton, 15 April 1863.

<sup>84</sup> Mitchell, 8 April 1863.

<sup>85</sup> Gambone, *The Life of General Samuel K. Zook*, 155; Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 82.

<sup>86</sup> Appleton, near Falmouth, Virginia, 15 April 1863.

Also in the middle of April, Roberts was given an opportunity to redeem himself in the eyes of troops who might have previously seen weakness in him. Again, alcohol consumption was the problem, but this time Roberts acted both quickly and forcefully. Joseph Appleton of Company F related the story:

The officers of our regiment had a big drunk the other night in one of the tents. Co F sent word down to the colonel that if he did not come up in fifteen minutes and stop the noise they would clean the officers all out. The colonel came on the double quick and made a scatterment among them and has six of them under arrest.<sup>87</sup>

Clearly Roberts had learned a lesson from his previous altercation and had this time acted with authority to end a disruptive situation. This incident seems to offer evidence that Roberts was growing as a commander.<sup>88</sup>

In the time spent in camp near Falmouth, Virginia, the 140<sup>th</sup> regiment learned much, and despite some internal personal conflicts, handled itself well. As the commanding officer of the 140<sup>th</sup>, Colonel Roberts deserves credit for seeing the regiment through this period of transition and growth. As Stewart stated in the regimental history, Roberts did receive the credit due him:

On more than one occasion, General Zook requested the Adjutant, when at his headquarters making report, to give Colonel Roberts his compliments and thanks for the excellent discipline of his command. Officers and men of the Regiment appreciated the personal attention of Colonel Roberts to their comfort and general welfare in camp.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 18 April 1863.

<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately, there is no mention of who the offending officers were or what became of them.

<sup>89</sup> Stewart, *History*, 361-362.

Unfortunately, these positive attitudes towards the colonel were not shared by Captain David Acheson, J. Milton Ray and possibly Sandie Acheson, all of Company C. However, as Stewart also stated, “It is the conduct of a commanding officer on the field of battle . . . that makes or breaks his reputation as a soldier.”<sup>90</sup> In this regard, Roberts would now have the opportunity to prove himself to his regiment and possibly redeem himself in the eyes of the three men who thought poorly of him or questioned his leadership abilities.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 362.

## CHAPTER FOUR: The Battle of Chancellorsville

With eight months of training and preparation behind them, the men of the 140<sup>th</sup> felt confident in their abilities and were anxious to finally see some action. Of interest at Chancellorsville is how the regiment and its leadership performed under strenuous battle conditions and how individual members of the regiment judged Colonel Roberts's performance during the battle.

"We have moved at last," wrote J. Milton Ray on 28 April 1863.<sup>1</sup> The previous evening the Second Corps "very suddenly got orders to pack up."<sup>2</sup> Then, around 5:00 a.m. on the 28<sup>th</sup>, they received "the command to sling Knapsacks Right Shoulder Shift & forward March up the river for the pontoons."<sup>3</sup> They marched just five miles that day,<sup>4</sup> "repairing the road as we went so that wagons and artillery could pass."<sup>5</sup> On the 29<sup>th</sup>, they marched about four miles and bivouacked in the vicinity of the United States Ford. Heavy rain led to slow going and at some points almost impassable roads. Then on 30 April at dusk, after waiting all day for the Third Division to cross the river,<sup>6</sup> they too crossed the Rappahannock River, via pontoons at the ford, "with little or no opposition or resistance."<sup>7</sup> They then marched about three more miles<sup>8</sup> and halted about 11 p.m., "[w]orn out,"<sup>9</sup> and in the vicinity of the enemy.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ray, near Falmouth, Virginia, 28 April 1863.

<sup>2</sup> Paxton, 29 April 1863.

<sup>3</sup> Mitchell, 28 April 1863.

<sup>4</sup> Stewart, *History*, 50.

<sup>5</sup> Potter, near Falmouth, Virginia, 9 May 1863.

<sup>6</sup> Stewart, *History*, 50.

<sup>7</sup> Mitchell, 1 May 1863.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Paxton, 30 April 1863.

<sup>10</sup> Potter, near Falmouth, Virginia, 9 May 1863.

On Friday, 1 May, the Battle of Chancellorsville commenced. At noon, Zook's brigade marched to a hill about a mile from the Chancellor House, where the brigade was formed into two lines, the 66<sup>th</sup> New York and the Pennsylvania 140<sup>th</sup> in the first line and the 57<sup>th</sup> and 52<sup>nd</sup> New York regiments in the second line.<sup>11</sup> Despite the "-ville" in its name, Chancellorsville was not a town but was simply a large two and one-half story brick home that had previously served as a tavern, a post office, a school and a boarding house.<sup>12</sup> It was now home to the Chancellor family, who occupied the house even during the battle. That day, the 140<sup>th</sup> regiment received its baptism by fire, courtesy of Rebel artillery shells. Although the regiment did not have a chance even to fire a gun in return, it did witness a sight "too horrible to relate," when the men saw a battery of six pieces "fire on the rebs at nearly point blank range."<sup>13</sup> "You may judge the consequences," was all Joseph Appleton could write of the matter. That night, the 140<sup>th</sup> went into the woods, where it was shelled all night. As Appleton lay on the ground and looked up into the night sky, he could not help but admire the pretty sight of the shells flying at night, as long as they were not flying at him.<sup>14</sup>

It was also on 1 May that Colonel Roberts made his first battlefield appointment. Back on 16 April, Captain Silas Parker of Company D resigned. He had become seriously ill while on picket, and had gone home to die, which he did in June. Roberts told the company to arrange an election, but it had no time to do

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<sup>11</sup> Josiah Marshall Favill, *The Diary of a Young Officer* (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, 1909), 229, quoting General Zook's official report to General Hancock.

<sup>12</sup> Noel G. Harrison, *Chancellorsville Battlefield Sites* (Lynchburg, Virginia: H. E. Howard, Inc., 1990), 16.

<sup>13</sup> Appleton, near Falmouth, Virginia, 8 & 10 May 1863.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 May 1863.

so before the regiment broke camp and moved into Virginia. So on 1 May, Colonel Roberts appointed Lieutenant Charles Linton of Company C as captain of Company D. The historian for Company D stated, “we were displeased because one from another Company was taken to command us.” As a result, the company felt “prejudice” against him, but this “gradually wore away” as Captain Linton “proved himself.”<sup>15</sup>

During the daylight hours of Saturday, 2 May, the 140<sup>th</sup> did not fight but rather built breastworks. Then in the evening, thanks to the surprise maneuvers of Confederate forces commanded by “Stonewall” Jackson, the Army of the Potomac found itself in a bad predicament. The Eleventh Corps was, according to Wilson Paxton of Company G, “broken and scattered” and in full retreat,<sup>16</sup> followed closely by the Rebels. In response, General Couch, the commander of the Second Corps, ordered his men to fix bayonets and prevent the desperately fleeing Union troops from passing. One report stated: “Every officer of our division, with drawn sword and pistol, was required to use all possible endeavor to hold them.”<sup>17</sup> But, nothing could stop the panicked retreat of the Eleventh Corps that day.

Soon, the terrified Eleventh departed, leaving the Second Corps on its own to face the charging Confederates. Just as the men of the Second Corps appeared ready to run too, up galloped General Hancock, who said, “You there, Colonel? Fall in, men, forward, follow me; we must stop Lee’s men . . . .” And, they did follow Hancock, because as John Paxton wrote, “to follow Hancock

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<sup>15</sup> Stewart, *History*, 315-316.

<sup>16</sup> Paxton, 2 May 1863.

<sup>17</sup> Gambone, *The Life of General Samuel K. Zook*, 162.

made one brave.”<sup>18</sup> Bravery, however, did not dictate success as the Union troops “[w]ere nearly taken- the Rebs made a dash through the woods after us. . . .”<sup>19</sup> At this point, General Zook approached his brigade and, looking “pale and anxious,” explained to the men that they were caught “between two fires.” He told the men, “If the line in our rear gives way, you are the last hope of the army.” Therefore, “I mean to hold my ground right here.” At this, the men answered that they would stand with him.<sup>20</sup> Then, General Zook went to Colonel Roberts and said, “There is only one chance for you, and that is to fight as long as you have a man, or surrender.”<sup>21</sup>

There was no surrender. The Rebels charged, and the 140<sup>th</sup> responded bravely. During a lull in the battle, Wilson Paxton scrawled in his diary, “Rebs charging our battery with one of their yells. Terrific firing. Cannon and Musketry, all night. How will it go.”<sup>22</sup> John Paxton, years later, described the situation as follows: “The Confederates charged us; I heard the awful rebel yell; now I saw them; this time I fired at a mark, a living mass; my cheeks flushed; my nerves grew steady; courage was renewed; I bit into powder; I had something to do.”<sup>23</sup> What Paxton, along with his comrades, did was hold their line, and in fact, “drove the rebs back about three hundred yards, but still the shells came thick.”<sup>24</sup> The Rebels retreated, and that night, according to J. R. Mitchell, the 140<sup>th</sup> was

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<sup>18</sup> Paxton, *Sword and Gown*, 321.

<sup>19</sup> Mitchell, 2 May 1863.

<sup>20</sup> Vaughan, “The Brand of Coward,” 331.

<sup>21</sup> Appleton, Chancellorsville, Virginia, 2 May 1863.

<sup>22</sup> Paxton, 2 May 1863.

<sup>23</sup> Paxton, *Sword and Gown*, 320.

<sup>24</sup> Appleton, Chancellorsville, Virginia, 2 May 1863.

“shelled like fury but lost none.”<sup>25</sup> This was all the more remarkable because the Rebels did not just fire shells but also “railroad iron, marrow teeth, chains, grape and canister thick and fast right at us.” They would see more of the same on Sunday morning, in a cannonading that General Hancock later pronounced the most terrific he ever experienced.<sup>26</sup>

However, not all of the 140<sup>th</sup> took part in these events. Two companies, A of Greene County and B of Mercer County, had been temporarily assigned to Colonel Orlando Morris of the 66<sup>th</sup> New York regiment, which was then told to report to Colonel Miles for picket duty.<sup>27</sup> These pickets built an entrenched picket line in front of the Second Corps’s lines, and “with rare courage and ability . . . held back again and again the assaulting columns” sent against them. Again at daybreak on 3 May, the enemy opened up a brisk fire along their whole line. Colonel Morris recalled that “[t]he firing was maintained for upwards of four hours, during which the enemy made repeated and determined assaults upon our lines, and was each time gallantly repulsed by our men.”<sup>28</sup> Of the performance of the men under his command, Colonel Miles stated that “every man fired with the utmost coolness and deliberation, . . . not a man flinched.”<sup>29</sup> And, in his book *Army of the Potomac*, William Swinton concluded that “Hancock’s front, especially, was assailed with great impetuosity, but the attacking column was held in check in the most intrepid manner by Hancock’s

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<sup>25</sup> Mitchell, 3 May 1863.

<sup>26</sup> Potter, near Falmouth, Virginia, 9 May 1863.

<sup>27</sup> Robert N. Scott, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, Volume XXV, Part I (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), 314.

<sup>28</sup> Bates, *History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 408.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

skirmish line, under Colonel Miles.”<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, as part of Miles’s picket line during these two days of battle, Companies A and B of the 140<sup>th</sup> earned great praise, not only from General Hancock but from General Couch as well.<sup>31</sup>

In the mean time, when the morning of 3 May arrived, the rest of the 140<sup>th</sup> found itself in a position as part of the rear guard,<sup>32</sup> holding open “[a] corridor of retreat” for the Union Third and Twelfth Corps.<sup>33</sup> According to Joseph Moody, “at 8 Am we were ordered down towards the H.Q. to support a Battery at the right of H.Q.”<sup>34</sup> The position of the companies was then as follows: F, D, I, C, H, E, K, G. Although the regiment was to the left of the house, Company F was the closest to the house, owing to the fact that the regiment had been previously about faced.<sup>35</sup> Mitchell stated, “Before having time to make or eat any breakfast fighting commenced in earnest & the shells & solid shot lit plentifully about over & amongst us.”<sup>36</sup> According to Samuel Potter, the Rebel batteries had “found the range of the rifle pits in which we were stationed, and were shelling us like fury when we were ordered out and marched right up in front of the battery that was shelling and lay flat down on our faces.”<sup>37</sup> The “shells were flying at us from 3 directions,” said Moody, so “we had to lay down on the Road.”<sup>38</sup> It was “a warm place,” wrote Wilson Paxton in his diary.<sup>39</sup> Samuel Potter wrote that “[a] number

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Stewart, *History*, 62.

<sup>32</sup> Vaughan, “The Brand of Coward,” 331.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Chancellorsville* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1996), 360.

<sup>34</sup> Moody, near Falmouth, Virginia, 13 May 1863.

<sup>35</sup> Stewart, *History*, 72.

<sup>36</sup> Mitchell, 3 May 1863.

<sup>37</sup> Potter, near Falmouth, Virginia, 4 May 1863.

<sup>38</sup> Moody, near Falmouth, Virginia, 13 May 1863.

<sup>39</sup> Paxton, 3 May 1863.

of shells burst so close that I felt their heat sensibly on my cheek.”<sup>40</sup> And, John Paxton, in his memoirs, wrote, “We lay down . . . as flat as we could, you may be sure, for the shells of the Johnnies were not six inches above our heads.”<sup>41</sup> Of this experience of being “exposed to a galling Croßfire,” Mitchell wrote that “[a]most certain death stared everyone in the face.”<sup>42</sup> It was during this time spent “laying,” that according to Moody, “some of our Reg were Killed some wounded.”<sup>43</sup> These casualties included the decapitation of a company officer by a shell, a gruesome and haunting visual image for the men who witnessed it.<sup>44</sup>

During the evening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the early morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, Porter Alexander’s seven Confederate batteries, or twenty-six guns, had been moved to within 750 yards of the Chancellor House, or just 600 yards from the position now held by the Pennsylvania 140<sup>th</sup> regiment. These guns took aim on the house, and their firepower was joined by a dozen more guns positioned to the west, all converging their fire on Chancellorsville. The veteran Confederate artillerists, who opened fire on everything around the Chancellor House, were more than happy to fire on a position that could not answer back, calling it “pie.”<sup>45</sup> But, one Union battery, protected by the 140<sup>th</sup>, answered back.

This battery was the First Corps’s 5<sup>th</sup> Maine Light Artillery, under the command of Captain George Leppien. It took a position in the rear of the Chancellor House and soon came under “a most galling fire.” The guns fell silent

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<sup>40</sup> Potter, near Falmouth, Virginia, 4 May 1863.

<sup>41</sup> Paxton, *Sword and Gown*, 342.

<sup>42</sup> Mitchell, 3 May 1863.

<sup>43</sup> Moody, near Falmouth, Virginia, 13 May 1863.

<sup>44</sup> Vaughan, “The Brand of Coward,” 333.

<sup>45</sup> Sears, *Chancellorsville*, 359; Vaughan, “The Brand of Coward,” 333.

one by one, until the last of them was “wrecked.”<sup>46</sup> At this point, Hancock ordered the nearest infantry, the 53<sup>rd</sup>, 116<sup>th</sup> and 140<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania, to haul off the guns so that they would not fall into enemy hands. Twenty-eight men of the 5<sup>th</sup> Maine had been killed or wounded,<sup>47</sup> including all of the officers and nearly all of the horses and men.<sup>48</sup> And, the wounds from the shellfire were ghastly. One Pennsylvania infantryman was “appalled to have mangled gunners plead with him ‘to shoot them, when you can’t’.”<sup>49</sup>

From the 140<sup>th</sup>, a party of about forty men, mostly from Company D,<sup>50</sup> volunteered to help remove the battery. Led by Captain Charles Linton, this detail, according to General Zook, “first drove two caissons into the woods out of the enemy’s sight and then returned and removed two guns to the same position.”<sup>51</sup> This was an amazing feat of strength and bravery because these guns were brass twelve-pounders,<sup>52</sup> and the men dragged them a distance of over one hundred yards.<sup>53</sup> Then, unbelievably, they returned a third time to assist men of the Second and Fourth Brigades in removing the remaining guns,<sup>54</sup> all the while under artillery fire. Captain Linton was noted for his great bravery during these actions. Stewart, the regimental historian, reported that in one instance, “Captain Linton and Isaac Sharp took hold of a limber and while lifting it

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<sup>46</sup> Sears, *Chancellorsville*, 363.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Favill, *The Diary of a Young Officer*, 231-232, quoting General Zook’s official report to General Hancock.

<sup>49</sup> Sears, *Chancellorsville*, 363.

<sup>50</sup> Stewart, *History*, 70, 317.

<sup>51</sup> Favill, *The Diary of a Young Officer*, 231-232; Stewart, *History*, 74; both quoting General Zook’s official report to General Hancock.

<sup>52</sup> Cannons made of brass that shot twelve-pound shells.

<sup>53</sup> Appleton, *Chancellorsville*, Virginia, 8 May 1863.

<sup>54</sup> Favill, *The Diary of a Young Officer*, 231-232; Stewart, *History*, 74; both quoting General Zook’s official report to General Hancock.

a shell passed under it, just missing their feet.”<sup>55</sup> Undaunted, these men continued in their efforts to remove the piece from the field. Quite understandably, the men of Company D found little problem accepting the captaincy of Linton, for he had indeed “proved himself” worthy of the position. For his part, Roberts had taken a chance in going outside of the company to appoint a captain, especially during a battle, but Linton justified Roberts’s appointment.

In the meantime, the Chancellor House caught fire. Since 1 May the house had been used as both a field hospital and Union headquarters. It was not proper military etiquette to fire on a hospital, but the fact that the building was also General Joseph Hooker’s headquarters made it fair game. Further, with the close proximity to the house of Leppien’s batteries, the Confederate artillery, in firing on these batteries, could not help but hit the house. Surgeons, in plying their trade, had commandeered several rooms of the Chancellor House to treat the wounded, which included two Confederates with leg wounds. The Chancellor women volunteered as nurses.<sup>56</sup> According to Sue Chancellor, the sitting room had been transformed into an operating room and the piano served as an amputating table. But on 3 May, the fighting was too terrific, and the Chancellor family and their neighbors were taking shelter in the basement of the house when Joe Dickinson of Hooker’s staff came down and told them to evacuate because the house was on fire.<sup>57</sup> One of Francis Chancellor’s daughters, who was fourteen at the time of the battle and who had taken cover in the basement,

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<sup>55</sup> Stewart, *History*, 317-318.

<sup>56</sup> Sears, *Chancellorsville*, 253.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

described what she saw as the house caught fire and her family and the wounded were quickly evacuated:

The sight that met our eyes as we came out of the dim light of the basement beggars description. The woods around the house were a sheet of fire, the air was filled with shot and shell, horses were running, rearing, and screaming, the men, a mass of confusion, moaning, cursing, and praying. They were bringing the wounded out of the house, as it was on fire in several places . . . we picked our way over the bleeding bodies of the dead and wounded. . . . At the last look our old home was completely enveloped in flames.<sup>58</sup>

Because Company F, commanded by Captain Thomas Henry, was the closest to the house, Hancock ordered it to assist in the evacuation of the wounded and the civilians from the burning building.<sup>59</sup> According to General Zook in his official report, this “duty was well performed under very severe fire.”<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately, however, not all of the civilians escaped unharmed. Joseph Appleton reported that he “saw three ladies over at the fight at that house and as we came away, they came along. But a shell knocked ones leg off! I don’t know what became of the other two. I thought it was a poor place for hoops.”<sup>61</sup>

The 140<sup>th</sup> was the last to leave the field that day. In the regimental history Stewart wrote: “The silencing and removal of the battery in our front opened the way for the unhindered advance of the enemy; and, as nothing further could be gained by holding our perilous position, the order was given to withdraw.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Harrison, *Chancellorsville Battlefield Sites*, 18-19.

<sup>59</sup> Bates, *History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 408.

<sup>60</sup> Favill, *The Diary of a Young Officer*, 231-232, quoting General Zook’s official report to General Hancock.

<sup>61</sup> Appleton, near Falmouth, Virginia, 28 May 1863.

<sup>62</sup> Stewart, *History*, 71.

Around noon the 140<sup>th</sup> followed the rest of the army in retreating to a new line. Joseph Appleton recalled, “We fell back the best we could; some carrying wounded, some guns and some dragging off the cannon. We were scatted for a short time but soon got together again. the rebs were so close on our heels that we lost some men as prisoners.”<sup>63</sup> In fact, according to Appleton, the 140<sup>th</sup> barely made it out:

and when we left the rebs were within a hundred yards of us. I carried off a load of guns our boys left. We went through a raking fire for half a mile and every one wonders how we escaped. Zook says we are the coolest regiment he ever saw. He says we don't fear danger or else don't know when we are in it. Our officers are good.<sup>64</sup>

Once they made it back to the strong defenses of Hancock's new line, which was located on the left side of the smoldering remains of Chancellor House, the 140<sup>th</sup> was rewarded with much needed rest for the remainder of the day.<sup>65</sup> After two days in this position, where it endured “occasional artillery fire of the enemy,” the 140<sup>th</sup> “re-crossed the river and returned to its old camp near Falmouth.”<sup>66</sup> Defeat in their first combat left the men of the 140<sup>th</sup> “a gloomy and disappointed crowd.”<sup>67</sup> Officially the 140<sup>th</sup>'s losses in the Battle of Chancellorsville were 7 killed, 28 wounded, 9 captured or missing, for a total of 44. The entire brigade's losses were 13 killed, 97 wounded and 78 captured or missing, for a total of 188.

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<sup>63</sup> Appleton, near Falmouth, Virginia, 12 May 1863.

<sup>64</sup> Appleton, Chancellorsville, Virginia, 2 May 1863.

<sup>65</sup> Bates, *History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 408; Stewart, *History*, 76.

<sup>66</sup> Bates, *History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 408.

<sup>67</sup> Paxton, 5 May 1863.

During the battle, Colonel Roberts had little opportunity for independent command. General Zook seems to have been with the 140<sup>th</sup> at all times, commanding it directly. Sandie Acheson wrote, “Our Brig. Genl., Zook, stuck to us all the time and used the rest of his Brigade as skirmishers.”<sup>68</sup> Joseph Appleton reported that the regiment acted with “Zook leading us,” and that during the shelling, “Zook laid with us.”<sup>69</sup> And, Private Lewis Swearingen wrote, “The Gen. thinks well of our Reg. & was with us nearly all the time during our stay across the River.”<sup>70</sup>

However, there is no reason to believe that Zook stayed close to Roberts because he doubted or was in any way insecure about Roberts’s abilities. Simply put, Zook was a fighting general, preferring to lead instead of watch, and he had to be somewhere, so he chose to be at the head of his strongest regiment. Joseph Appleton wrote, “This Zook is one of the best men I ever saw. He goes like a soldier should; like a common man.”<sup>71</sup> That said, it makes sense that the brigade commander and the regimental commander were together often during the battle, as leaders and as comrades in arms. Appleton even recorded a conversation that he overheard the two of them have after the battle on 3 May, when Colonel Roberts supposedly said to Zook, “General, you were in a pretty hot place,” to which Zook replied, “Not a damned bit hotter than your regiment

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<sup>68</sup> Fulcher, *Family Letters*, 420.

<sup>69</sup> Appleton, near Falmouth, Virginia, 10 & 12 May 1863.

<sup>70</sup> Lewis Swearingen, near Falmouth, Virginia, to his sister Lavinia, Beaver County, Pennsylvania, 11 May 1863, Beth Lewis Collection, privately held (Hereafter cited by last name, location and date).

<sup>71</sup> Appleton, near Falmouth, Virginia, 16 May 1863.

was.”<sup>72</sup> Such dialogue is the relaxed communication of men who forged a bond of experience and, in the process, had cast aside proper military protocol.

Unfortunately, because of his lack of independent command, it is difficult to judge the battlefield performance of Colonel Roberts. Certainly, no negative comments were made, leading to the conclusion that Roberts’s performance, if not exemplary, was at least adequate. However, there is little doubt that the 140<sup>th</sup> regiment performed admirably during the battle, and this performance reflects highly on the leadership skills of Colonel Roberts in the eight months leading up to the battle. His men maintained their discipline and poise and did not shy away from immense personal danger.

From all accounts, the men of the 140<sup>th</sup> were lucky to have survived the bombardment they endured on the morning of 3 May. According to Appleton, Zook stated that the position they held that morning “was the hottest place he had seen since the war started.”<sup>73</sup> These are very strong words coming from a man who led his men on an ill-fated charge at Marye’s Heights less than five months before. But, in Appleton’s mind, Zook’s words were warranted, for to him, the Battle of Chancellorsville “was enough to use anybody up. I tell you it was enough to knock the fat off the best of them.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 12 May 1863.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 16 May 1863.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Between the Storms

The 140<sup>th</sup> was now a veteran regiment, and the men could take pride in their performance in their first battle. Yet, they still had to cope with the residual effects of the battle while at the same time preparing for further conflict. Of interest in this chapter is the impact of the Battle of Chancellorsville on Colonel Roberts and the men of his regiment. Also of interest is the post-battle opinions voiced by the members of the regiment concerning Roberts.

The Battle of Chancellorsville was indeed a strenuous baptism by fire for the “green” soldiers of the Pennsylvania 140<sup>th</sup>, and as a result, many of them suffered some degree of what would now be termed post-traumatic stress. This stress manifested itself in many ways. The stress for enlisted men might have resulted in hospital stays or leave requests. For example, on 4 May 1863, J. R. Mitchell of Company G wrote: “took sick last night lay around to day till evening & then for the 1<sup>st</sup> time had to go to the Hospital took a fine lot of pills staid all night & got a pretty refreshing nap-.”<sup>1</sup> Stressed officers had an option that enlisted men did not have. They could simply resign their commission and say good-bye and good riddance to military life, and several officers of the 140<sup>th</sup> did just that. Second Lieutenant Alex Calvert of Company F resigned his commission and returned home,<sup>2</sup> and Captain Gregg resigned before the battle was even over,<sup>3</sup> citing “advanced age and physical disability.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell, 4 May 1863.

<sup>2</sup> White, *History of Company F*, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Potter, Chancellorsville, Virginia, 5 May 1863.

<sup>4</sup> Vaughan, “The Brand of Coward,” 335.

The Reverend Marcus Ormond, whose controversial appointment as chaplain of the 140<sup>th</sup> already made him one of the most written about members of the regiment, did little to increase his popularity after the Battle of Chancellorsville. David Scott reported that “[o]ur chaplian has not bene well never since the Battle of chancelersville. he has never preached any for us since.”<sup>5</sup> Then the next day, J. Milton Ray wrote that “Mr. Ormond has resigned and gone home he was not popular with the Officers and especially the Field officers.” Ray hoped the 140<sup>th</sup> would find “a earnest working Chaplain one that the men as well as officers would like and help to encourage in good work.”<sup>6</sup> Battle-related stress might have caused Ormond to resign, but so too might have a petition urging his resignation, signed by many members of the regiment, that he received on 15 May 1863.<sup>7</sup> Surely both factors played a part in his resignation. However, the fact that Ormond did not preach a sermon after the battle, including the ten days prior to receiving the petition, suggests that the stress of the battle did much to alter his state of mind.

Even General Zook decided after Chancellorsville that he needed a vacation. Turning his command over to Colonel Orlando H. Morris of the 66<sup>th</sup> New York infantry, Zook, with a friend and two aides, took a train north for a twenty day leave.<sup>8</sup> Colonel Roberts also requested and was granted a leave of absence, but the circumstances surrounding his leave are worthy of exploration,

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<sup>5</sup> David W. Scott, near Falmouth, Virginia, to his mother, 13 June 1863, Richard Temple Collection, Privately Held.

<sup>6</sup> Ray, near Falmouth, Virginia, 14 June 1863.

<sup>7</sup> Florida DAR, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell*, 82.

<sup>8</sup> Gambone, *The Life of General Samuel K. Zook*, 175.

for ultimately the reasons for his taking leave, the length of his leave, and the opinions of the men of the 140<sup>th</sup> concerning his leave, all reflect on his character.

On 8 May 1863, Captain David Acheson noted, “Col. Roberts is sick—worn out, played out.”<sup>9</sup> Two days later Colonel Roberts requested a twenty day medical leave of absence, citing a letter from Dr. John Wishart, the regimental surgeon, which stated that Roberts was suffering from “complete prostration of his nervous system” as a result of his participation in the Battle of Chancellorsville.<sup>10</sup> The day before, Colonel Roberts had acknowledged feeling “tired and weary.”<sup>11</sup> By the 14<sup>th</sup>, he reported some progress: “I was very much fatigued but am getting quite well again.”<sup>12</sup> The evidence for once supports Acheson and his assessment that Roberts was, “worn out, played out,” or, as Dr. John Wishart suggested, possibly even suffering the effects of a nervous breakdown.

Although his leave of absence was granted, effective 13 May,<sup>13</sup> and he could have left immediately, Roberts chose to stay to oversee another change of company positions and a movement of the regiment, both of which were ordered by General Zook and which were scheduled to take place on the 13<sup>th</sup>.<sup>14</sup> The company position change, which was previously so hotly contested and complained about by David Acheson, seems to have been made this time without argument. The new order of the companies within the regiment became

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<sup>9</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 91.

<sup>10</sup> Temple, “Colonel Richard P. Roberts,” 7.

<sup>11</sup> Colonel Richard Roberts, near Falmouth, Virginia, 9 May 1863.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 May 1863.

<sup>13</sup> Temple, “Colonel Richard P. Roberts,” 7.

<sup>14</sup> Stewart, *History*, 305.

C, B, K, I, A, H, G, D, F, E.<sup>15</sup> Of this change, Joseph Moody of Company H wrote, “I have just got outside of Camp under a Beech Tree for shade and quiet for they are changeing some of the Co acording to Seniority of Capt so all is bustle.”<sup>16</sup> This change was made at the same time that the regiment was moved about one and a half miles down the road for sanitary reasons and because, as Samuel Potter wrote, “the brigade is all to be together.”<sup>17</sup> No doubt at the end of this “bustle” Roberts was happy to begin his leave on 15 May.

Both Captain David Acheson and Private Lewis Swearingen remarked that they expected the colonel back the first week of June,<sup>18</sup> others doubted he would return at all. On 15 May, James Mitchell concluded, “Col. Robberts goes home today on 20 days sick leave. . . I don’t look for Col. Robberts to come back again.”<sup>19</sup> Mitchell must have based his prediction on some solid evidence because, on 2 June, two doctors in Beaver, Pennsylvania requested, on Roberts’s behalf, a leave extension of an additional twenty days. Dr. M. Lawrence stated that Colonel Roberts “has symptoms that threaten seriously to terminate in typhoid fever” and “that his health has not been good as I am informed since the battle of Chancellorsville. I further declare my belief that he will not be able to resume his duties safely in a leß period twenty days.”<sup>20</sup> A Dr. George Allison, who examined Roberts with Lawrence, diagnosed the colonel as “seriously indisposed. and in our opinion unabell to travel and in danger of being

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<sup>15</sup> Powelson, *History of Company K of the 140<sup>th</sup>*, 24.

<sup>16</sup> Moody, near Falmouth, Virginia, 13 May 1863.

<sup>17</sup> Potter, near Falmouth, Virginia, 11 May 1863.

<sup>18</sup> Fulcher, *Family Letters*, 380; Lewis Swearingen, near Falmouth, Virginia, 31 May 1863.

<sup>19</sup> Florida DAR, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell*, 82.

<sup>20</sup> Dr. M. Lawrence, Beaver County, Pennsylvania, 2 June 1863, Typescript, Richard Temple Collection, original in the National Archives.

prostrated by typhoid fever.”<sup>21</sup> The colonel clearly could not rejoin his regiment. Based on these letters, superiors extended his leave<sup>22</sup> but failed to inform the members of his regiment. Some logically started wondering “what is keeping him” or if he would return at all.<sup>23</sup> By 10 June, nearly a week after the men had expected his return, they had learned of the extension and its basis.<sup>24</sup>

Rather surprisingly, Captain David Acheson, his brother Sandie, and Sandie’s messmate Milton, made nothing of the colonel’s extended leave. This is unexpected, especially from David Acheson, who in the past had quickly pointed out the colonel’s alleged faults and criticized his actions. One might have expected him to seize the opportunity afforded him by the colonel’s leave to malign the colonel. However, Acheson made no insinuations in his letters home or in his private journal suggesting that Colonel Roberts’s leave of absence was for any reason other than illness. In fact, none of the men seemed to have criticized or questioned the validity of his absence. Perhaps this was because the colonel’s performance during the Battle of Chancellorsville was satisfactory, or perhaps they were humane enough to realize he was really sick. In fact, whereas the colonel was such an important topic of discussion in the letters written by the Achesons prior to Chancellorsville, he is not mentioned again by either of them. On David Acheson’s part, his only comment that could even remotely be considered a critique of the colonel’s performance is that “[t]he 140<sup>th</sup> did well.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Drs. M. Lawrence and George Allison, Beaver County, Pennsylvania, 2 June 1863, Typescript, Richard Temple Collection, original in the National Archives.

<sup>22</sup> Temple, “Colonel Richard P. Roberts,” 7.

<sup>23</sup> Ray, near Falmouth, Virginia, 6 June 1863.

<sup>24</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 94; Fulcher, *Family Letters*, 422; Ray, near Falmouth, Virginia, 14 June 1863.

<sup>25</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 89.

That said, it seems fair to assume that Colonel Roberts somehow won the respect of the young captain during the Battle of Chancellorsville.

Two soldiers did directly address Roberts's performance in battle. Private Joseph Appleton certainly expressed a positive assessment:

Well I suppose the colonel has given you all a history of the fight. The boys are all wanting him back and when he comes the old camp will ring with cheers. He is the favorite of the regiment since the fight. Some of them thought he would not stand fire but he proved to have the right kind of mettle.

There isn't a company in the regiment that isn't down on the lieutenant colonel. He shows too much authority when [Roberts] isn't here. He is an old granny. If R. P. should leave this regiment it would take one half to guard the other. But R. P. had better not try to leave this regiment. If he does, it will be the worst thing he ever did.<sup>26</sup>

Private Lewis Swearingen heartily agreed:

We are impatiently awaiting the return of Col R. P. Roberts. I suppose he will be back in 3 or 4 days. He is a man that is well liked by the Regiment. I suppose there is not a Col. in the service that has less enemies than He. Some are afraid he will resign But I hope not. He has proved himself kind & agreeable in Camp & gallant on the field of Battle. these are two requisites We dearly and joyfully appreciate. None could fill his station better.<sup>27</sup>

Although evidence from two men, especially two from Beaver County, hardly constitutes a reasonable sample, no other surviving evidence contradicts their opinions. Perhaps the unit did consider Roberts "gallant" and wanted him to return to them as their leader as soon as possible. Maybe Roberts had even impressed the Achesons. Surely if the Achesons thought he was incompetent, the opinions of others would not have influenced their own letters home.

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<sup>26</sup> Appleton, near Falmouth, Virginia, 28 May 1863.

<sup>27</sup> Swearingen, near Falmouth, Virginia, 31 May 1863.

Roberts, in the mean time, missed much during his leave of absence. The biggest change was within the ranks of senior leadership. Major General Darius Couch, the commanding officer of the Second Corps, requested on 22 May to be relieved of command, and his position was filled by General Winfield Hancock. Brigadier-General Caldwell replaced Hancock as the commander of the First Division.<sup>28</sup> Then on 5 June, J. R. Mitchell wrote in his diary:

Things truly assume a peculiar appearance & I believe that 'Old Joe' [General Joseph Hooker] is in a perfect quandary. The Balloonist reports that there is no force of Rebels across the river; that they have been shipped off to who knows where! . . . No doubt but that 'Old Lee' is going to show us some of his handiwork.<sup>29</sup>

Lee's army had indeed packed up camp and headed north, leaving just a skeleton force across the river to fool the Union army into thinking that everything was as usual. His plan had worked. The Rebels were on their way to Pennsylvania, and the only course of action left to the Army of the Potomac was to pack up quickly and chase them.

On 14 June, the Second Corps, including the 140<sup>th</sup>, broke camp near Falmouth, Virginia, formed the rear guard of the army, and, "left the front & commenced the big march"<sup>30</sup> north in pursuit of Lee. Unused to such a forced march, many men, who could not handle the pace or the heat, fell by the wayside. Sandie Acheson was one of those men. On 18 June he became ill and

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<sup>28</sup> Stewart, *History*, 83; Gottfried, *Brigades of Gettysburg*, 109; Scott D. Hartwig, "No Troops Had Done Better"; John C. Caldwell's Division in the Wheatfield, July 2, 1863," in *The Second Day at Gettysburg: Essays on Confederate and Union Leadership*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher, (Kent, Ohio and London: The Kent State University Press, 1993), 138.

<sup>29</sup> Mitchell, 5 June 1863.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 June 1863.

was left behind, ending up in a hospital in Alexandria, Virginia, where he remained for over a month.<sup>31</sup> This meant that one previous critic of Roberts would not witness his behavior at Gettysburg. Then on 20 June, the positions of the companies in the 140<sup>th</sup> regiment were changed again. The order designated was now as follows: A, E, H, B, I, K, D, G, F, C.<sup>32</sup> The men once again demonstrated no problem with the change.<sup>33</sup> However, as will be seen in the next chapter, this change played a huge role in who lived and who died in the Battle of Gettysburg.

When word of Lee's northward advance reached Roberts, against doctors' orders he departed immediately for the army, "saying that his native state was being invaded and that his life was nothing in such an emergency."<sup>34</sup> On the first leg of his journey, he temporarily fell ill again but regained his strength through "the power of the will to dominate and subdue physical weakness and disease."<sup>35</sup> When Roberts arrived in Washington on 22 June 1863, he acknowledged not feeling "so well,"<sup>36</sup> and, enclosing a medical diagnosis of "malarial fever," requested an extension to his leave of ten days. Though there is no response on record to this request, just five days later, Roberts rejoined his regiment in Maryland as it pursued Lee's army.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 97-98, 118.

<sup>32</sup> Stewart, *History*, 83.

<sup>33</sup> Florida DAR, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell*, 94.

<sup>34</sup> Temple, "Colonel Richard P. Roberts," 4.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Palmquist, "Beaver Countians at the Battle of Gettysburg," <http://www.bchistory.org/beavercounty/BeaverCountyTopical/Wars/BCGettysburg.html/BcatGettysburg.html>, 2-3, last viewed 18 February 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Temple, "Colonel Richard P. Roberts," 7; Roberts, Washington City, 22 June 1863.

<sup>37</sup> Temple, "Colonel Richard P. Roberts," 8.

Linking up with his troops proved difficult. He traveled up the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, which ran adjacent to the Potomac River, to the crossing point at Edwards Ferry.<sup>38</sup> He then traveled thirty exhausting miles on foot before finding their camp on 28 June.<sup>39</sup> In writing the regimental history, Stewart remarked, concerning Roberts's appearance upon his return to the regiment, that "one could see that he was far from being a well man."<sup>40</sup> William Shallenberger concurred when he wrote, "[Roberts] said he felt well, and was quite cheerful, but I told him he was not fit for duty."<sup>41</sup> Certainly these conclusions appear warranted. The trip back to the army had drained him, but the days ahead would prove even more difficult.

The next morning, Monday, 29 June, Roberts retook command of the regiment as it was ordered to march. Shallenberger wrote, "I rode by his side all day. He did not talk much- said he did not feel very well."<sup>42</sup> Roberts picked a tough day to go back to work. The Second Corps "marched 32 miles," and "[a] great many [men] gave out."<sup>43</sup> Despite this, on the 30<sup>th</sup> Roberts reported feeling "quite well."<sup>44</sup> Then on Wednesday, 1 July, as the Second Corps departed Uniontown, Maryland and crossed into Pennsylvania,<sup>45</sup> the colonel "appeared more lively than the day before, although at times [Shallenberger] discovered a

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<sup>38</sup> Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 277.

<sup>39</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 99; William Shallenberger, Virginia, to Emma Roberts, Beaver County, 28 August, 1863, Richard Temple Collection, privately held (Hereafter cited by last name and date).

<sup>40</sup> Stewart, *History*, 363.

<sup>41</sup> Shallenberger, 28 August 1863.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Florida DAR, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell*, 98.

<sup>44</sup> Roberts, northern Maryland, 30 June 1863.

<sup>45</sup> Gottfried, *Brigades of Gettysburg*, 109-110.

dreamy, absent-mindedness, which was not natural to [Roberts].”<sup>46</sup> On 1 July, Colonel Roberts also wrote what would be his final letter to his daughter, and in it, he stated simply, “I am well. very well.”<sup>47</sup> “Dreamy, absent-mindedness” aside, Roberts apparently was feeling better.

Obviously, the men of the 140<sup>th</sup> had a great deal of respect for their colonel and wanted him back leading them in the battle they knew was coming. Roberts apparently performed well at Chancellorsville, so much so that not even David Acheson had anything bad to say about him. Roberts was not a well man, but despite his illness he returned to his command, spurred probably by his love for his country and his sense of duty and honor. The fact that he even returned to his regiment was brave, if not a bit reckless. What remained to be seen is how the colonel would be able to deal with his own physical or mental infirmities while at the same time leading his men in one of the deadliest battles of the Civil War, the Battle of Gettysburg.

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<sup>46</sup> Shallenberger, 28 August 1863.

<sup>47</sup> Roberts, Pennsylvania, 1 July 1863; most other notes to his daughter were signed, “Good bye for the present,” or “Your affectionate Pa,” but this note is signed, “Good by my dear, Your affectionate, Pa.” Is this evidence of a presentiment of death?

## CHAPTER SIX: The Battle of Gettysburg

Up to this point, Colonel Richard Roberts had led his men well. He had made mistakes, but he had learned from them. His men were well trained and were ready to follow him. They respected him, and they respected his leadership abilities. Now, Colonel Roberts would face his greatest, and sad to say, his final challenge. He would lead his men into a whirlpool of carnage and death in a place that now bears the infamous moniker, the Wheatfield. This battlefield, nestled between other battlefields known today as the Peach Orchard and Devil's Den, was the site of a truly heroic struggle that held great implications for both armies and ultimately influenced the final outcome of the three day long battle at Gettysburg, and in doing so, influenced the final outcome of the war.

One soldier of the 140<sup>th</sup> wrote from Gettysburg that they had “marched 17 days steady to get here.”<sup>1</sup> Of those days, 1 July was surely the most difficult. Estimates of the length of the march made by the Second Corps that day range anywhere from thirty to thirty-seven miles, and the estimated weight of each man's equipment ranged from forty to fifty pounds.<sup>2</sup> No wonder a Pennsylvanian with the Second Corps called it a “hard, hard march. Many a brave boy was obliged to stop by the wayside to be driven up by wretched provost guards.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the march that began that morning in Uniontown, Maryland and ended at 1:30 a.m. on 2 July, was not the usual forward march by any means.

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<sup>1</sup> Gambone, *The Life of General Samuel K. Zook*, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank*, 64.

<sup>3</sup> Noah Andre Trudeau, *Gettysburg: A Testing of Courage* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 119.

Instead, it left the troops frustrated and confused. Wilson Paxton of Company G wrote:

On the march again. After marching 3 or 4 miles about faced and marched back near where we started from in the morning. About faced again and retraced our steps. Halted for dinner and to allow the reserve artillery to pass. Crossed the state line. Halted about 2 o'clock a.m. but was soon routed up for the march.<sup>4</sup>

These actions left them exhausted and still three miles away from the town of Gettysburg. After just two hours rest, they were awakened at about 3:30 a.m. Following a "hasty breakfast" and a "rigid" inspection, they waited anxiously until 6:00 a.m. when they again heard the order to "fall in" and "march."<sup>5</sup>

"A little after daylight in a mighty rain"<sup>6</sup> on 2 July 1863, the Pennsylvania 140<sup>th</sup> regiment, of Zook's brigade, of Caldwell's division, of Hancock's Second Corps, arrived at Gettysburg and took position near the right flank of the army. An hour later, the brigade was repositioned to Cemetery Ridge, "on the left center of the Union line." Upon arriving on the ridge, General John Caldwell deployed his division ". . . in columns of regiments by brigade, with Zook's brigade being placed in a second line behind Kelly's Irish brigade. This deployment, which was compact, "covering no more than a 500-yard front, [was] obviously designed for rapid movement rather than defense or attack."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Paxton, 1 July 1863.

<sup>5</sup> Gettysburg Battlefield Commission, *Pennsylvania at Gettysburg: Ceremonies at the Dedication of the Monuments Erected by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to Major General George G. Meade, Major General Winfield S. Hancock and Major General John F. Reynolds, and to Mark the Positions of the Pennsylvania Commands Engaged in the Battle*. Volume II (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: William S. Ray, 1893). 673-674.

<sup>6</sup> Gambone, *The Life of General Samuel K. Zook*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Campbell, "Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield," *Gettysburg Magazine* 3 (July 1990): 28-29.

Zook's brigade was comprised of four regiments, the New York 52<sup>nd</sup>, 57<sup>th</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> regiments and the 140<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania regiment. At Gettysburg, the brigade had a total strength of 975 men, making it the largest brigade in the division.<sup>8</sup> Among the regiments of the brigade, the Pennsylvania 140<sup>th</sup> was by far the largest, outnumbering the other three regiments combined. In fact, it was one of the largest regiments on the field that day. Perhaps for this reason, "Zook placed it on the right and instructed his other regiments to guide on it."<sup>9</sup>

The morning rains departed, replaced by the heat of a cloudless July day.<sup>10</sup> On its forced march to Gettysburg, the Second Corps had outpaced its supply wagons, leaving the men hungry. One soldier recalled that through "a diligent search of our pockets and haversacks we got coffee enough to give a swallow or two a piece. . . . We gave our belts a hitch and all who smoked indulged vigorously while we awaited events."<sup>11</sup> Some men spent the morning watching troop movements and pickets from both armies exchange shots while others went to Plum Run for water or played cards or wrote notes home. Many men, overcome with fatigue, ignored the heat and the events unfolding around them and slept.<sup>12</sup>

During these hours of waiting Colonel Roberts and William Shallenberger had a conversation. Roberts awoke from a nap and, still resting prone on the grass, told Shallenberger that "he did not feel at all well, and told [him] he felt

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>9</sup> Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The Second Day* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 277.

<sup>10</sup> Campbell, "Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield," 30.

<sup>11</sup> Trudeau, *Gettysburg*, 300.

<sup>12</sup> Campbell, "Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield," 30.

almost sure he would not escape in the approaching battle.”<sup>13</sup> He then exacted a pledge from Shallenberger that he would be a life-long friend to his little, motherless daughter. According to Stewart in the regimental history, Roberts “was calm and confident of the final success of our armies, but evidently realized the sacrifice of life that victory involved, and was resolved to lead where others dared follow.”<sup>14</sup> Shallenberger later stated it more simply to Roberts’s daughter Emma when he said that her father “evidently had a presentiment of his fate.”<sup>15</sup>

After five hours of waiting, the men had front row seats for a surprising and amazing spectacle. Concerned about higher ground in front of him, Major General Daniel Sickles, without orders from General George Meade, ordered his Union Third Corps to advance three quarters of a mile and occupy the high ground. This movement, which occurred shortly before 3:00 p.m., broke up the Union defenses, leaving the Third Corps dangling out in the open<sup>16</sup> with “both flanks in the air”<sup>17</sup> and making that corps and the whole Union army vulnerable to attack.<sup>18</sup> Sickles’s scheme indeed had a critical flaw, and Henry Hunt, the artillery chief of the Army of the Potomac, recognized it immediately, stating that “it would so greatly lengthen the line . . . as to require a larger force than the Third Corps alone to hold it.”<sup>19</sup>

Upon seeing this movement, Zook’s men gathered at the most favorable position to witness what Shallenberger described as “a division of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps .

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<sup>13</sup> Shallenberger, 28 August 1863.

<sup>14</sup> Stewart, *History*, 364.

<sup>15</sup> Shallenberger, 28 August 1863.

<sup>16</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 31.

<sup>17</sup> Major Thomas B. Rodgers, “St. Louisans Among Gettysburg Heroes,” *St. Louis (MO) Globe Democrat*, Brake Collection, United States Army Military History Institute, 9 March 1913, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 31.

<sup>19</sup> Trudeau, *Gettysburg*, 301-302.

. . . moving forward in line of battle by brigades. Beautifully the movement was executed—flags flying and bayonets glistening in the sunlight as they march[ed] against the foe.”<sup>20</sup> General Caldwell, who was standing next to General Hancock, could not understand the meaning of the advance, and asked Hancock what he made of it. With a smile, Hancock replied, “Wait a moment, you will soon see them tumbling back.”<sup>21</sup>

Lieutenant General James Longstreet, commander of the Confederate First Corps, had been preparing all morning to attack. In *Battle Cry of Freedom*, James McPherson stated that when Longstreet saw Sickles’s corps move out into the open leaving the Round Tops unoccupied, he should have notified Lee about the possibility of a flanking movement. However, according to McPherson, “Longstreet had already tried at least twice to change Lee’s mind. He did not want to risk another rebuff. Lee had repeatedly ordered him to attack here, and here he meant to attack.”<sup>22</sup> Between 3:00 and 3:30 p.m., Confederate batteries,<sup>23</sup> comprised of over sixty artillery pieces which had moved unseen through the woods opposite the Third Corps’s line,<sup>24</sup> opened on Sickles’s newly placed line.<sup>25</sup> By 4:00 p.m.,<sup>26</sup> the Confederate divisions of Hood, McLaws and Anderson,<sup>27</sup> with a force of 15,000 battle-hardened veterans,<sup>28</sup> were striking

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<sup>20</sup> Hartwig, “No Troops Had Done Better,” 143.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), 657.

<sup>23</sup> Hartwig, “No Troops Had Done Better,” 144.

<sup>24</sup> Vaughan, “The Brand of Coward,” 342-343.

<sup>25</sup> Hartwig, “No Troops Had Done Better,” 144; Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 31.

<sup>26</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 31.

<sup>27</sup> Rodgers, “St. Louisans Among Gettysburg Heroes,” 1.

<sup>28</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 657.

Sickles's line at Devil's Den, Little Round Top, Houck's Ridge and on the edge of the Wheatfield. By 4:30 p.m., Sickles's men were hard pressed and Sickles was calling for reinforcements.<sup>29</sup>

General Meade sent the Fifth Corps and the batteries of the Reserve Artillery to Sickles's aid, but that was not enough, and Hancock's Second Corps got the call.<sup>30</sup> Hancock ordered Caldwell's division, 3,300 men strong and the closest reserves to the action, to report to Sickles. The bugles sounded, and it began marching, but then Barnes's division passed in front of it on its way to support the Third Corps, and upon seeing these troops move in, Hancock ordered Caldwell's division to reverse direction and return to its original position on Cemetery Ridge and to await further orders, a move that both confused and angered the men of the division.<sup>31</sup> Then, shortly before 5:00 p.m., after another hour of restless waiting, the troops once again received the orders to "[f]all in."<sup>32</sup> Caldwell had received orders to go to the assistance of the Fifth Corps, the corps that had previously been sent in to support Sickles's overextended ranks.<sup>33</sup> Caldwell's ranks were quickly formed and the men stood at "order arms."<sup>34</sup>

At this moment two memorable events occurred. In Colonel Kelly's Irish brigade, Father William Corby delivered his now famous absolution to the troops, which most of the division, including General Hancock, watched with respect.<sup>35</sup> In

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<sup>29</sup> Campbell, "Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield," 31.

<sup>30</sup> Trudeau, *Gettysburg*, 352-353.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 354; Campbell, "Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield," 31.

<sup>32</sup> Campbell, "Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield," 32.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen H. Light, "The Wheatfield and Stony Hill at Gettysburg," <http://www.militaryhistoryonline.com/gettysburg/articles/wheatfield.aspx>, 7, last viewed 18 February 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Campbell, "Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield," 32.

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

fact, Colonel Roberts and his men are noted to have removed their caps in prayer.<sup>36</sup> Then, in Zook's brigade, this absolution was followed by an inspirational speech given by Colonel Richard Roberts to his regiment, but overheard and appreciated by many:

Men of the 140<sup>th</sup>! Recollect that you are now defending your own soil, and are fighting to drive the invader from your own homes and firesides. I shall therefore expect you to conduct yourselves as if in presence of your wives, your sisters, and your sweethearts, and not disgrace the flag you bear or the name of Pennsylvanians.<sup>37</sup>

This hastily given address was received with cheers by the regiment,<sup>38</sup> for Roberts "meant what he said and they knew it."<sup>39</sup> Henry Fisher, the son of Jacob Fisher, recalled that his father, a member of Company I from Beaver County, told him another story. Fisher said that after Roberts made this speech, Roberts told those around him "he would be killed on that field, and turning to his aide, asked him to send his horse home."<sup>40</sup>

Caldwell's division then hurried south on the double quick towards Little Round Top. The division was led by Cross's brigade, which was followed by Kelly, then Brooke, with Zook's brigade bringing up the rear.<sup>41</sup> However, as Zook's brigade started south, a mounted officer, Major Henry Tremain, the senior

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<sup>36</sup> Palmquist, "Beaver Countians at the Battle of Gettysburg," 5.

<sup>37</sup> David L. Ladd and Audrey J. Ladd, eds., *The Bachelder Papers: Gettysburg in Their Own Words*, Volume I (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside House, Inc., 1995) 417; Campbell, "Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield," 32, quoting *The Bachelder Papers*; Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 104, quoting *The Bachelder Papers*.

<sup>38</sup> Ladd and Ladd, *The Bachelder Papers*, Volume I, 417.

<sup>39</sup> Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 275.

<sup>40</sup> Henry N. Fisher, "Jacob Fisher's Memories: Beaver County, PA." Contributed by Tim and Bonnie McClain, March 1998, USGenWeb Archives: <ftp://ftp.rootsweb.com/pub/usgenweb/pa/beaver/military/fish0001.txt>, last viewed 18 February 2004.

<sup>41</sup> Campbell, "Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield," 32.

aide-de-camp to General Sickles, rode hastily up to the brigade and approached General Zook.<sup>42</sup> Tremain considered trying to find Caldwell but knew that it would take too long to do so,<sup>43</sup> so he instead asked General Zook “to detach his brigade and move them to his right front,” because holding the position required immediate reinforcements. Zook replied “that his orders were to follow the column.” Tremain then “repeated his request, promising Zook to protect him and to return with the proper order from Sickles.” At this second request, Zook replied, “Sir, if you will give me the order of General Sickles I will obey it.” At this, the major replied, “General Sickles’ order, general, is that you file your brigade to the right and move into action here.”<sup>44</sup> Zook then supposedly sent staff members to Caldwell<sup>45</sup> to advise his commander of his departure from the division,<sup>46</sup> and after doing so shouted “[f]ile right!” and led his brigade to the southwest towards the fighting.<sup>47</sup> Clearly Zook’s brigade was detached without the consent or knowledge of General Caldwell, the division commander.<sup>48</sup> The problems this caused Caldwell are outside of the scope of this work, but needless to say Caldwell went into battle thinking he had Zook’s brigade, his largest brigade, bringing up the rear, and he did not.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Hartwig, “No Troops Had Done Better,” 154.

<sup>44</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 33; on page 244 of his book, *The Diary of a Young Officer*, Josiah Favill stated that Zook talked to Sickles directly, but he is the only source to say so, and this is probably not correct. He might have said so to defend Zook from any accusation of military impropriety. It should be further noted that Jorgensen, Light and Gambone ignored the testimony of Tremain and accepted Favill’s contention that Sickles and Zook spoke directly to each other, whereas Campbell and Hartwig accepted Tremain’s testimony over Favill’s.

<sup>45</sup> They apparently never arrived, if indeed they were sent.

<sup>46</sup> Jay Jorgensen, *Gettysburg’s Bloody Wheatfield* (Shippensburg, Pennsylvania: White Mane Books, 2002), 90.

<sup>47</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 33.

<sup>48</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 288.

After consulting General Birney, Zook deployed his brigade north of Trostle Woods in two lines, the first line consisting of, from left to right, the 66<sup>th</sup> New York, the 52<sup>nd</sup> New York and the 140<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania, and the second line consisting of the 57<sup>th</sup> New York, acting in support.<sup>49</sup> Once in position, the men were ordered to load their guns.<sup>50</sup> This completed, the brigade moved obliquely to the right<sup>51</sup> through Trostle Woods where they “passed over and through” the retreating brigades of Barnes’s division of the Fifth Corps, across the Wheatfield road and its fences, through the ten to thirteen acre Wheatfield and into the “rocky woodland” of the Rose Woods.<sup>52</sup> The musketry roared in front of them,<sup>53</sup> and batteries to their right were firing rapidly. “The tumult was deafening,” and according to Josiah Favill, “no word of command could be heard.” “Thick smoke obscured their vision,” and “rounds crashed through the tree limbs overhead.”<sup>54</sup> And of course, the troops saw and heard the sights and cries of the wounded from Barnes’s division,<sup>55</sup> slowly making their way to the rear, or begging for help as the men of Zook’s brigade passed by.

Having passed through the Wheatfield, Zook’s brigade moved towards a rocky knoll at the southwest corner of the field.<sup>56</sup> Confederate General Kershaw described a hill “covered with heavy timber and thick undergrowth” which he

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<sup>49</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 35-37.

<sup>50</sup> Gottfried, *Brigades of Gettysburg*, 123.

<sup>51</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 37; Stewart, *History*, 102.

<sup>52</sup> Hartwig, “No Troops Had Done Better,” 159; Gambone, *The Life of General Samuel K. Zook*, 6.

<sup>53</sup> Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 275.

<sup>54</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 37.

<sup>55</sup> Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 275.

<sup>56</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 39.

named the “The Stony Hill.”<sup>57</sup> This hill had just been taken by General Kershaw’s 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> South Carolina regiments of McLaws’s division after a battle with Barnes’s division. Of moving up this hill, Stewart of the 140<sup>th</sup> recalled the “[s]cores of huge boulders, so thickly set that we had great difficulty to preserve our alignment.”<sup>58</sup> During its approach to this hill, Zook’s brigade encountered Kelly’s brigade of Caldwell’s division for the first time. Unknowingly, both brigades were attacking the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> South Carolina regiments at the same time.<sup>59</sup> Of course if Caldwell had maintained control of Zook’s brigade, such an overlapping of force would not have occurred, but because Zook’s brigade was operating independently from the rest of Caldwell’s division, Caldwell had no way of knowing where Zook’s brigade would be on the field. However, this concentration of force caused no harm. In fact, it may have enabled the Union forces to take the hill from Kershaw’s men.

When Zook and Kelly’s brigades independently attacked the hill, Zook’s men were a little bit ahead of Kelly’s men in their charge and thus received the brunt of the fire from Kershaw’s men. Major Mulholland of Kelly’s brigade watched as Zook’s brigade approached a line of timber on the slope of the hill and “received a withering line of fire from the concealed enemy, which staggered them for a moment.”<sup>60</sup> Josiah Favill of Zook’s staff recalled that “we soon came to a standstill and a close encounter, when the firing became terrific and the slaughter frightful. We were enveloped in smoke and fire, not only in front, but on

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<sup>57</sup> Light, “The Wheatfield and the Stony Hill,” 2; this hill is officially marked at Gettysburg as “The Loop.”

<sup>58</sup> Gottfried, *Brigades of Gettysburg*, 123-124.

<sup>59</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 39.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

our left, and even at times on the right.”<sup>61</sup> At this moment General Zook, who was still mounted, received a mortal wound and was helped to the rear.<sup>62</sup>

The loss of Zook halted the advance of the brigade. Instead the brigade, for a time, stood stationary and exchanged three or four volleys with Kershaw’s men. Then Lieutenant Colonel Charles G. Freudenberg of the 52<sup>nd</sup> New York, who was now commanding officer of the brigade, ordered, “Cease Fire!” and “Forward, March!” No sooner had he made these commands than he was shot three times. Despite his wounding, the brigade moved again up the hill towards the enemy.<sup>63</sup> And officially, the brigade was now under the command of Colonel Richard P. Roberts of the Pennsylvania 140<sup>th</sup>.

Because Zook’s men had taken most of the Confederate fire, Kelly’s Irish brigade could advance up the hill largely unmolested. In fact, before the Confederates turned their guns on the Irish brigade, the officers of the Irish brigade were close enough to use their revolvers. After exchanging a few rounds, Kelly’s men flanked the 7<sup>th</sup> South Carolina regiment, forcing a retreat of that regiment. The 3<sup>rd</sup> South Carolina now became Kershaw’s flank and swung to its right to meet both Kelly’s and Zook’s attack.<sup>64</sup>

In the meantime, Colonel Roberts of the 140<sup>th</sup>, which was positioned on the extreme right flank of Zook’s brigade, ordered “the four left companies” of his

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<sup>61</sup> Hartwig, “No Troops Had Done Better,” 159.

<sup>62</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 39; there is some discrepancy as to the nature of Zook’s wound, with some saying he suffered a gut shot, but the testimony of Dr. Potter of the 57<sup>th</sup> New York has led Zook historian A. M. Gambone to conclude that a .58 caliber ball “ricocheted from a rock, flattened to some undetermined degree and was then deflected back into Zook’s upper, left torso.”

<sup>63</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 40; Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 278.

<sup>64</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 40.

regiment to make a “considerable wheel to the right”<sup>65</sup> in order that his regiment might directly face the Confederates. However, because the rest of the brigade was guiding on the 140<sup>th</sup>, and because Zook and Freudenberg were no longer around to make necessary adjustments, executing this maneuver caused the brigade as a whole to veer too far to the left and overlap the right of Kelly’s brigade, resulting in what one officer called a “deplorable state of confusion.”<sup>66</sup> The brigade also had to deal with dense woods and large boulders that “retarded” forward momentum, as well as the proximity of Anderson’s Georgians who were posted along the southern edge of the Wheatfield, firing on Kelly’s flank.<sup>67</sup>

However, these problems were quickly solved, for Roberts, unaware of the problems on the brigade’s left flank, then ordered his regiment to move by the right flank.<sup>68</sup> This maneuver moved the right wing of the 140<sup>th</sup>, comprised of Companies G, F and C, away from the boulder-strewn hill and into an oat field. Stewart stated, “With ringing cheers we gained this position and immediately come into close quarters with the enemy.”<sup>69</sup> Unfortunately this move exposed the men, leaving them little cover, while their adversaries, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> South Carolina regiments, had the protection of a slope in the landscape.<sup>70</sup> Colonel

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<sup>65</sup> Robert N. Scott, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, Volume XXVII, Part I (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), 395.

<sup>66</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 40-41.

<sup>67</sup> Hartwig, “No Troops Had Done Better,” 160.

<sup>68</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 40.

<sup>69</sup> Jorgensen, “Gettysburg’s Bloody Wheatfield,” 97; Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 40.

<sup>70</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 40.

Roberts ordered his men to “[l]oad and fire at will!”,<sup>71</sup> and according to Lieutenant Colonel Fraser, the 140<sup>th</sup> responded with “a brisk fire, which it kept up with great firmness and coolness, steadily driving the enemy before it . . . .”<sup>72</sup>

While this was occurring, the rest of Caldwell’s division, combined with the left flank of Zook’s brigade, made a final push on Kershaw’s right flank.<sup>73</sup> “I have never been in a hotter place,”<sup>74</sup> said Kershaw, as his men were overwhelmed and forced off the Stony Hill. After this occurred, the men of Kelly’s and Zook’s brigades found the hill they had just won covered with the bodies of Kershaw’s men, and due to the angle of the hill and the positions of the opposing forces on the hill, Kershaw’s men were mostly dead, for “nearly every one of them [had been] hit in the head or upper part of the body.”<sup>75</sup>

On the Stony Hill the Union advance stopped.<sup>76</sup> Caldwell’s men were content to watch the South Carolinians retreat while at the same time stealing a brief moment to recover and to regain their bearings and to understand their accomplishment. Nowhere in any record does it mention that there was an attempt made at this time to push the retreat of the Confederates. Instead, it appears that the brigade as a whole was content to stop its charge, set up a defensive position and hold the Stony Hill. In hind sight, this was a smart move, for although Zook’s brigade did not know it, Confederate reinforcements were already on the way to mount another attack.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Scott, *Official Records*, Volume XXVII, Part I, 395.

<sup>73</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 41.

<sup>74</sup> Light, “The Wheatfield and Stony Hill at Gettysburg,” 8.

<sup>75</sup> Trudeau, *Gettysburg*, 363.

<sup>76</sup> Palmquist, “Beaver Countians at the Battle of Gettysburg,” 5.

Although Colonel Roberts succeeded Freudenberg as the commander of the brigade, he never knew it,<sup>77</sup> for, as the colonel of the 140<sup>th</sup>, he was located on the far right of the line and was completely out of touch with the majority of the brigade. Further, Roberts knew nothing of the wounding of Zook or Freudenberg because no messenger made it to Roberts with news of his new command. As noted by William Shallenberger, Roberts simply had no clue he was in charge:

I went to him as he stood to the rear of the centre, and asked if he had rec'd any orders. I told him the enemy was trying to flank us on the right and supposed we would have orders to move in that direction. He said "I have not seen Genl Zook nor one of his aides. I have no orders."<sup>78</sup>

Roberts's orders and actions reflect that he was concerned only with the positions and movements of his regiment and not the rest of the brigade. As such, it is only fair to judge Colonel Roberts's performance based on his command of his regiment, and not his command of the brigade. Therefore, it is not fair to blame him for the previously mentioned entanglement of the right flank of Kelly's brigade with the left flank of Zook's brigade during the push which drove Kershaw's Confederates off of the Stony Hill. Nor is it right to credit him with the ultimate success achieved by the left flank of the brigade, except that in ordering the movement by the right flank, Colonel Roberts did his part to alleviate the crowded position of the brigade.

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<sup>77</sup> On page 246 of his book, Josiah Favill stated that he attempted to turn command of the brigade over to Colonel Orlando Morris, the colonel of the 66<sup>th</sup> New York who had himself been wounded (see *Bachelder Papers*, 423) but couldn't find him, so he turned command of the brigade over to Lieutenant Colonel Fraser of the 140<sup>th</sup> instead. He probably meant Freudenberg, for Freudenberg was made aware of his command, whereas by the time Roberts was killed and Fraser became acting brigade commander, Favill was already occupied in taking General Zook to the hospital.

<sup>78</sup> Shallenberger, 28 August 1863.

When Kershaw's South Carolinians, after "deadly, close quarter fighting,"<sup>79</sup> were driven off the Stony Hill, they fell back to the John Rose farm to regroup. Kershaw then said he "saw General Wofford riding at the head of his fine brigade (of Georgians) then coming in . . ." <sup>80</sup> to his left, marching down the Wheatfield Road. Brigadier General William Barksdale's brigade had broken the Union lines at the Peach Orchard, allowing Wofford's brigade, also of McLaws's division, to advance.<sup>81</sup> The sight of Wofford and his men "reinvigorated the offensive spirit among the South Carolinians"<sup>82</sup> who, under Kershaw's lead, quickly regrouped and then fell in on Wofford's right. Some Georgia regiments from Semmes and Anderson's brigades also joined them.<sup>83</sup>

This combined Confederate force moved toward the Wheatfield and the exposed right flank of the Union line, which was still held by Colonel Roberts and the Pennsylvania 140<sup>th</sup>.<sup>84</sup> Roberts saw this large force approaching his right, and due to the smoke, thought it was retreating Union soldiers of the Third Corps and ordered a cease fire.<sup>85</sup> A man in the 57<sup>th</sup> New York of Zook's brigade, who had a clearer view than the men of the 140<sup>th</sup>, described the scene: "The Rebels in battalion front came from the opposite woods into the opening. They were marching steadily, with colors flying as though on dress parade, and guns at

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<sup>79</sup> Jay Jorgensen, "Anderson Attacks the Wheatfield," *Gettysburg Magazine* 14 (January 1996), 8.

<sup>80</sup> J. Warren Gilbert, *The Blue and the Gray: A History of the Conflicts During Lee's Invasion and Battle of Gettysburg* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Evangelical Press, 1922), 77.

<sup>81</sup> Jorgensen, "Anderson Attacks the Wheatfield," 9.

<sup>82</sup> Trudeau, *Gettysburg*, 379.

<sup>83</sup> Light, "The Wheatfield and Stony Hill at Gettysburg," 9.

<sup>84</sup> Campbell, "Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield," 47.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-48; Gottfried, *Brigades of Gettysburg*, 125.

right-shoulder-shift. They looked harmless, but the lingering boys did not care to make a closer acquaintance. . . .”<sup>86</sup>

The first Confederate volley quickly dispelled the 140<sup>th</sup>'s wrong assumption that the lines of men approaching them were of the same persuasion. Roberts, realizing then that the Confederates were attempting to flank his regiment, and by extension the brigade, rushed towards the right side of his line.<sup>87</sup> At this point in time, “a rebel battery gain[ed] position and pour[ed] its enfilading fire down our lines. With intrepid courage and reckless daring our colonel rush[ed] in front of his regiment to lead it by the right flank and by change of line to meet and check if possible the flanking party.”<sup>88</sup> While performing these duties the *Beaver Argus* claimed that Roberts shouted, “My brave boys, remember that you are upon your native soil, your own Pennsylvania. Drive back the Rebel invaders!”<sup>89</sup> but the best his men could recall, as stated by Stewart in the regimental memoirs, is that as “the brave Colonel, with pale, set face, passed down the line to the right, his words rang out above the din of battle: “Steady men,” . . . “Fire low, Remember you are Pennsylvanians.”<sup>90</sup> These were his last known words, for at his arrival on the far right side of his line, which was held by Captain David Acheson and the men of Company C of Washington County, Roberts, “with sword in one hand and hat in the other,”<sup>91</sup> was killed, possibly the

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<sup>86</sup> Sears, *Gettysburg*, 303.

<sup>87</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 47-48.

<sup>88</sup> Gettysburg Battlefield Commission, *Pennsylvania at Gettysburg*, 674.

<sup>89</sup> Palmquist, “Beaver Countians at the Battle of Gettysburg,” 6.

<sup>90</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 40.

<sup>91</sup> Moody, 2 July 1863.

victim of several bullet wounds.<sup>92</sup> His death occurred at about 6:00 p.m.,<sup>93</sup> “not more than 20 feet from the big rock near which the monument of the 140<sup>th</sup> stands.”<sup>94</sup> Then, just a moment later and almost at his side, Captain David Acheson, while “rallying his men to avenge the death of their gallant Colonel,”<sup>95</sup> suffered a fatal chest wound.<sup>96</sup>

The events that followed are outside of the scope of this work and are dealt with in a cursory fashion, mentioned simply to complete the story and satisfy the curiosity of the reader. Lieutenant Colonel John Fraser now commanded the regiment and, although he did not know it, the brigade as well. Under his command, Fraser said that the regiment held stubbornly for some time, but was ultimately forced to retreat when both flanks of the regiment were turned.<sup>97</sup> In his official report, written 1 October 1863, General Kershaw of the Army of Northern Virginia painted a different picture when he stated: “The enemy gave way at Wofford’s advance, and, with him, the whole left wing advanced to the charge, sweeping the enemy before them, without a moment’s stand, across the stone wall, beyond the wheat-field, up to the foot of the mountain.”<sup>98</sup> No matter whose account you believe, the Union forces did retreat, but only back to the original line held by the Army of the Potomac prior to Sickles’s controversial

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<sup>92</sup> Gettysburg Battlefield Commission, *Pennsylvania at Gettysburg*, 674; it was reported by Stewart in the regimental history, page 364, that Roberts was shot “through his heart,” but in a diary entry written the evening of 2 July, Joseph Moody reported that Colonel Roberts “fell dead from a ball which struck him in the mouth, passing through his neck.”

<sup>93</sup> Powelson, *History of Company K*, 28.

<sup>94</sup> White, *History of Company F*, 8.

<sup>95</sup> Stewart, *History*, 307.

<sup>96</sup> Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 280.

<sup>97</sup> Campbell, “Caldwell Clears the Wheatfield,” 47-48.

<sup>98</sup> Randy Strickland, <http://www.angelfire.com/va3/southernrites/gettys1.html>, 8, last viewed 2 February 2004.

advance. There, the Union line held, setting the stage for the infamous third and final day of the battle, a day which the remnants of the 140<sup>th</sup> spent as spectators.

The 140<sup>th</sup> regiment's official losses (killed, wounded or missing) at Gettysburg were 241 out of 589, or almost 41%.<sup>99</sup> These losses included fourteen officers.<sup>100</sup> The three companies on the right side of the regiment, G, F and C, being in the open and exposed, suffered the greatest loss: Company C lost 32 out of 72, Company F, 24 out of 58, Company G, 22 out of 64.<sup>101</sup> But, the historian for Company C writes that his company only had 38 men engaged, the rest being detailed for other service at the time. If true, then Company C, guarding the right flank of the regiment, lost 32 out of 38 men, a truly staggering statistic.<sup>102</sup> With these great losses, a sergeant, much to his surprise, found himself "now in command of the camp" on the evening of 2 July.<sup>103</sup>

The historical importance of the struggle on the Stony Hill at the Battle of the Wheatfield is worth mentioning. Without speculating or engaging in what-ifs, it is still safe to say that the involvement of Caldwell's division in the battle stemmed the tide of advance of General Longstreet's Confederate forces and protected the Round Tops from being overrun. If the Confederates had gained control of these positions, then the Union left flank would have been turned and the outcome of the Battle of Gettysburg might have been different. In this regard,

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<sup>99</sup> Dennis B. Ardinger, "Civil War Soldiers of the 140<sup>th</sup> Regiment Listed on the Pennsylvania Monument at Gettysburg From Beaver, Greene & Mercer Cos., PA," *Western Pennsylvania Genealogical Society Quarterly*, 22, 1, (Summer 1995): 22.

<sup>100</sup> Ladd and Ladd, *The Bachelder Papers*, Volume II, 1102.

<sup>101</sup> Stewart, *History*, 105.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

<sup>103</sup> Florida DAR, *The Daily Journal of James McDonald Mitchell*, 99.

the heroic actions and sacrifices of the 140<sup>th</sup> played a significant role in the ultimate preservation of the Union.

Judging a man's performance in battle is a difficult task. Fighting happens so quickly and is so stressful for the participants that their recollections and opinions often vary greatly. However, when it comes to the performance of Colonel Richard P. Roberts on 2 July 1863, no secondary source suggested that Roberts made a mistake or acted poorly in any way. Of Roberts's most daring order, the move by the right flank that positioned his right three companies out in the open in an oat field, Sara Walters, the author of *Inscription at Gettysburg* and a licensed tour guide of the battlefield, stated that the movement was "properly ordered."<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, participants in the battle unanimously asserted that the actions of Colonel Roberts were admirable. Both Lieutenant Colonel Fraser and J. J. Purman described Roberts as "brave," while General John C. Caldwell referred to him as "gallant."<sup>105</sup> Stewart, in the regimental history, stated that Roberts acted "[w]ith intrepid courage and reckless daring,"<sup>106</sup> and that "Colonel Roberts was a part of it, and in the fore-front, at every moment. He knew no fear. He was alert and self-possessed but impatient to lead the great body of men into line of battle."<sup>107</sup> Shallenberger concurred, telling Emma Roberts that her father "was singularly cool, and in action, brave to rashness."<sup>108</sup> But, it was Joseph Moody who paid Roberts the greatest tribute when he wrote in his diary on the

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<sup>104</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 107.

<sup>105</sup> Scott, *War of the Rebellion*, Volume XXVII, Part I, 395; Ladd and Ladd, *The Bachelor Papers*, Volume I, 417; Stewart, *History*, 112.

<sup>106</sup> Stewart, *History*, 107.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 364.

<sup>108</sup> Shallenberger, 28 August 1863.

evening of 2 July that when Colonel Roberts “fell dead,” . . . “The Regt. sustained a loss at this moment that never will be filled by as brave a man or better commanded.”<sup>109</sup> Therefore, based on existing evidence, there is no reason to doubt that Colonel Roberts overcame any mental or physical infirmity and acted with great skill and courage at the Battle of Gettysburg.

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<sup>109</sup> Moody, 2 July 1863.

## **CONCLUSION:**

On 16 July 1863, a meeting was held at the Beaver County Courthouse with the purpose of paying tribute to Colonel Richard P. Roberts. At this meeting, the following resolution was passed:

Resolved, that Col. Roberts and his brave and patriotic companions in arms have won for themselves imperishable honor and are justly entitled to the grateful remembrances of all the wise and the good in this Republic and deserve to have their names inscribed on the long list of heroic defenders of their country and of the cause of human liberty.<sup>1</sup>

However, the letters of Captain David Acheson of Company C cast a shadow on this epitaph by suggesting that Roberts was less than worthy of tribute. Instead, these letters portray him as a man who was at times incompetent in command, who succumbed to moments of doubt and weakness, and who waffled in defending his political ideology.

Only three other members of the regiment, Joseph Appleton of Company F and Sandie Acheson and his messmate J. Milton Ray, both of Company C, criticized their colonel. Appleton made negative comments about the colonel on two occasions, once when he failed to stand up to a large group of drunk soldiers, and once when he failed to stand up to General Hancock. Whether or not Roberts erred in either situation is debatable, and both criticisms, though fair, do not prove weakness of character on the part of the colonel. Appleton also counterbalanced these comments with various positive comments concerning the colonel. J. Milton Ray's comments, although of value, seem to stem from the close relationship he had with the Acheson brothers and largely echo the

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<sup>1</sup> Temple, "Colonel Richard P. Roberts," 9.

negative opinions of David Acheson. There is little doubt that Captain Acheson shared his opinions of the colonel with Ray and that Ray was influenced by these opinions. Surprisingly, Sandie Acheson, David's brother and Ray's messmate, withheld any negative comments about the colonel until April 1863, when he, seemingly also influenced by his brother, complained about the weakness of the regiment's resolutions. In short, it is not difficult to imagine Captain Acheson, frustrated by his "growing dislike" for his colonel, visiting his brother in his mess and sharing his opinions with him. In turn, his opinions probably influenced the opinions of his brother and J. Milton Ray. Therefore, it is not a stretch to consider these negative opinions as one voice.

The origins of this voice seem to have formed under the influence of several biases, among them age, occupation, county of origin and political affiliation. David Acheson was a young student from Washington County, and as such, he admired and favored Lieutenant Colonel Fraser, a professor from his county, and desired that one day the lieutenant colonel would ascend to the command of the regiment. As demonstrated in several instances, the men of the regiment were strongly influenced by county affiliation, and Captain Acheson was not above sharing in this bias. Furthermore, the fact that Acheson was a student and Fraser a professor only served to strengthen Acheson's bond to Fraser. Captain Acheson was also a staunch Republican, as was Colonel Roberts, so it was of some surprise to Acheson that Roberts co-authored a set of resolutions condemning the Peace Democrats that Acheson considered weak. In criticizing Roberts for these resolutions, Acheson failed to understand one important point:

Roberts was part of a committee that was assigned the task to write a set of resolutions that fairly and accurately represented the viewpoint of the regiment as a whole. In doing so, necessity dictated that Roberts set his own strong political beliefs aside to assist in the authorship of a document that would meet the approval, and thus gain the signatures of, the largest number of the regiment. This was a difficult task, for the men came from four counties of varying political tendencies. Yet, the committee won a resounding victory, securing the signatures of all but two members of the regiment. Acheson should have recognized the difficulty of the task confronting the committee and praised the committee for its success, but instead he allowed his own bias to cloud his thoughts, the result of which was the singling out and condemnation of the colonel. Finally, to term Roberts an “ignoramus” simply because Roberts lacked knowledge and skill in military affairs is ludicrous, for most army officers, including Acheson himself, lacked proper training and knowledge. Case in point, neither soldier knew that company position was decided by the seniority of the captains of the companies, and yet Acheson blamed Roberts both for the error and for Roberts’s desire to correct the error.

In the regimental history, Robert Stewart described Captain David Acheson as “a young officer of rare ability and winsome personality.”<sup>2</sup> Stewart made an interesting word choice in using the adjective “winsome,” which is defined as “generally pleasing and engaging often because of a childlike charm and innocence.” There is no doubt that Acheson was well liked by all the members of his regiment, including Colonel Roberts. In fact, no known source

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<sup>2</sup> Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg*, 107.

referred negatively to the captain. However, Stewart touched on something in his word choice which possibly gets at the heart of the matter. Acheson was young, and to use John Paxton's words, was full of "the exuberance and not a little of the indiscretion of youth." In examining Acheson's writings, it is this exuberance that comes to the forefront. Acheson was so driven by his own belief system that he could not relate to or support anyone who did not share his beliefs, especially a superior officer whose outlook was tempered by the wisdom associated with age, experience and even personal loss. Acheson simply could not understand or relate to Roberts, so he disliked him. As such, it is necessary to take Acheson's biases into account when examining his criticisms of his colonel. In doing so, the reader will undoubtedly discount Acheson's criticisms and recognize them for what they are, the words of a young idealist whose convictions had not yet been tempered by the experiences and realities of life.

Furthermore, the members of the regiment, including the four men previously mentioned in this conclusion, said nothing negative about Colonel Roberts after the Battle of Chancellorsville. Instead, existing sources are filled with praise for a man who seemed to, through his performance on the field of battle, dispel any doubt in his ability. When he went home sick after Chancellorsville, the men of the 140<sup>th</sup> wanted him to return, and when he led them into battle at Gettysburg, the men were proud to follow him and confident that he would guide them well; and Roberts did not let them down. Even though ill and nagged by a presentiment of death, he made the right decisions, and ultimately gave his life while standing at the front of the regiment guiding them

into position to best defend against the attacking enemy. Of course, the great irony is that Colonel Roberts and his greatest critic, Captain Acheson, died within feet and minutes of each other. It is left to the imagination to wonder what report Captain Acheson would have given of Roberts's actions if Acheson had survived the battle. It is also unfortunate for the sake of Roberts's reputation that Sandie Acheson fell ill before the battle and was not present to witness Colonel Roberts in his greatest moment. Surely both men would have written that they were wrong about Colonel Roberts, that he was indeed a great patriot, a good leader and the right man for the job.

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