



The 24th Regiment of Michigan Volunteers led by Col. A. Morrow (raising the flag) fights a desperate rearguard action near the Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg, July 1, 1863

## *The encounter between the 24th Michigan and the 26th North Carolina on the first day at Gettysburg*

*By Curtis D. Crockett*

There are a number of fighting units in the American Civil War whose deeds are indelibly impressed upon our minds due to their distinguished and heroic performance on the field of battle. If this is true for most major battles of the Civil War, it is certainly true for the Battle of Gettysburg. The 1<sup>st</sup> Minnesota, 20<sup>th</sup> Maine regiments, Barksdale's Brigade have rightfully earned their place in history. The memory of these and many other units stand on their own for individual valor at Gettysburg. But there is another class of fighting units, mostly regiments, which are remembered for their heroism and bravery and the mere will to stand and fight but are always bound in memory in conjunction with another fighting unit ; that of its foe. Such regiments demonstrate a rare phenomenon of exhibiting all of the admirable battlefield qualities in equal measure with their enemy so that they are remembered in history and spoken of always in conjunction with each other.

Students of Gettysburg will agree that the names of the 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan and the 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina regiments are inextricably entwined in memory due to their short but strategically significant and savage struggle on the first day of that battle, leaving them each with casualty counts, which were among the highest of the Civil War. Truly the troops in these two regiments, those who left the field and those who did not, all "colored themselves with valor" that day and played a significant role in the outcome of the battle. Their encounter represents one of the gripping incidents of the Battle of Gettysburg, if not the entire Civil War.

These regiments shared few physical characteristics in common. Neither knew their common fate nor destination when they left the fields of Virginia for the Potomac River in mid-June of 1863. There were, however, a number of characteristics shared in their character and fiber, which determined and explained their performance on the field at short range and against an equally determined foe. Those characteristics are what determine why men stand and fight to annihilation instead of running and exhibit a will to fight and not retreat. Both regiments were made of veteran troops. The North Carolinians had the edge on experience, but both were accustomed to being under fire and had performed valiantly. Both were distinguished in their rigorous training and continual emphasis on training and discipline. The 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina was surely one of the best drilled regiments in the Confederate service. Certainly, discipline was not a distinguishing characteristic of all regiments in this war, and in fact, may have been the exception. Both regiments were led by the finest, competent and brave officers, another characteristic which was not universal among all Civil War units. The regiments were led by two extraordinary, brave colonels, whose courage and determination undoubtedly set the tone for the fight. Finally, the members of both regiments had much to lose by a display of cowardice. They were formed from companies whose members came from relatively confined areas in their states. Also, these regiments were both distinguished by the number of relatives in their ranks. The 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan had 135 brothers in the regiment<sup>1</sup> and there was one company of the 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina which had 16 family members in it.<sup>2</sup> Members of a fighting unit are less likely to show cowardice when they have to go home and explain their behavior to close family and friends ; something which they could look forward to doing for the rest of their lives.

Perhaps a key motivating factor for the 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan was that it had only recently earned its welcome into the Army of the Potomac's Iron Brigade. The Iron Brigade of the I Corps' First Division was distinguished by the tall, stiff, broad-brimmed black hats its soldiers wore. The Michigan contingent had been in the Iron Brigade for the better part of a year, but had earned the black hats only in late May, 1863. Surely a key factor for the 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina was a desire to whip "yankeedom" and its record of not having lost a fight. Such was the condition and character of these troops as they marched off to Gettysburg, as highly trained, battle-hardened fighting units with a high sense of purpose, a high sense of trust in their commanders and a passion to defend the honor of their respective states ; Michigan as a relatively new state and North Carolina as one which had been reluctant to leave the Union.

At the time of the battle of Gettysburg, the 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina was a part of North Carolinian Brigadier General Richard Pettigrew's Brigade. Pettigrew's Brigade was attached to Major General Henry Heth's Division of the newly formed Army of Northern Virginia's III Corps, commanded by Lieutenant General A.P. Hill. The regiment was formed in August, 1861 from central and western North Carolina companies. Its commander was the regiment's former drillmaster, Henry King Burgwyn, Jr., known as the "boy colonel" of the Confederacy. The "boy colonel" took over command of the regiment, when its first commander, Zebulon Vance was elected governor of North Carolina, where he was to serve for the duration of the war. Burgwyn was a mere 21 years old at the confrontation on McPherson's Ridge on July 1, 1863. Burgwyn had been a cadet at the Virginia Military Institute after graduating from the University of North Carolina, where his brigade commander, Richard Pettigrew was a

<sup>1</sup> Orson B. Curtis, *History of the Twenty-Fourth Michigan of the Iron Brigade, Known as the Detroit and Wayne County Regiment*, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> R. Lee Haddon, "The Deadly Embrace", *Gettysburg Magazine*, July 1, 1991, p. 19.

professor. While at VMI, Burgwyn was noticed by VMI Instructor Major Thomas Jackson, later Confederate Lieutenant General Thomas (“Stonewall”) Jackson, who provided him with a shining recommendation for a commission in the Confederate States Army when the war broke out.<sup>3</sup> Jackson made such an indelible impression on the “boy colonel” that Burgwyn likely used him as a model in his military career, certainly in his emphasis on discipline and training. Burgwyn’s life, up to his dying breath, was characterized by ambition, motivation and an ability to lead.

The 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan was organized almost a year to the day after its confederate rival, in downtown Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan. There is still a soldiers and sailors monument to Detroit’s Civil War veterans in the middle of downtown Detroit at Campus Martius, the exact location where the crowd gathered to listen to the patriotic speeches which led to the forming of this regiment. Henry A. Morrow, a familiar figure and a judge in Detroit was elected colonel. Ironically, but not unusual in this war, Morrow was a native of a secessionist state, Virginia, which was to become the main battleground in the east for the preservation of the Union. Despite his southern birth, Morrow became an outspoken advocate for the preservation of the Union asking the young men at Campus Martius to “*come forward and sustain your government*”.<sup>4</sup> Morrow was a protégé of Lewis Cass, who had discovered him while Cass served as a U.S. Senator in Washington, D.C. The aged Cass, who gave his last public address at that July, 1862, meeting at Campus Martius when the regiment was formally organized, had also been a territorial governor of Michigan, served in the U.S. Cabinet in two positions and been an unsuccessful democratic candidate for president in 1848.

The 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina unknowingly began the Gettysburg campaign on June 18, 1863, setting out for an unknown destination from Culpepper, Virginia. By June 25, it was clear that the regiment was involved in an invasion of the north after crossing the Potomac River below Shepherdstown, West Virginia. Before joining the Army of Northern Virginia, the 26<sup>th</sup> had fought from September, 1861, until the Spring of 1862 in eastern North Carolina against Major General Ambrose Burnside’s troops in the Battle for New Berne, part of Burnside’s expedition against the coast of North Carolina. The men were shuffled to the Virginia Peninsula in June, 1862, and took part in the Battle of Malvern Hill on July 1, 1862, a year to the day before the encounter in Gettysburg. Before being ordered back to Virginia in June, 1863, the regiment saw action in engagements at Rawls Mills and Goldsboro, North Carolina. When it arrived at Greenwood, Pennsylvania, this highly disciplined, extremely confident fighting unit consisted of over 800 men.

In contrast, the 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan was a much smaller fighting unit of about 496 men. These troops had marched 160 miles since June 12 to Gettysburg from Fredericksburg, Virginia. Ironically, the regiment crossed the Potomac on the same day as its adversary but at Edward’s Ferry, below Harper’s Ferry, some miles south of Shepherdstown. Having fought with the Iron Brigade for nearly a year without the trademark black hats, the Michigan regiment’s battle experience was not as extensive as that of the 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina. However, the regiment had fought at Fredericksburg, Fitzhugh Crossing and Chancellorsville, all within the last year. For some reason a rumor was spread that the 24<sup>th</sup> was comprised of “bounty” troops and it took the unit some time to live this falsehood down. But with its record at the battles of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, the 24<sup>th</sup>’s members were wearing the black hats of the Iron Brigade by

<sup>3</sup> Archie K. Davis, *Boy Colonel of the Confederacy*, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Curtis, *Twenty-Fourth Michigan*. P. 31

July 1, 1863. The black hats, which were similar to the regular army hats before the war, were the idea of the Iron Brigade's former commander, Brigadier General John Gibbon, who had wanted a brigade of all mid-western troops. The Iron Brigade had earned its name from Major General George McClellan. McClellan, as commander at that time of the Army of the Potomac, saw the Brigade in action under Gibbon at South Mountain and witnessed it "holding like iron" at Turner's Gap. The Brigade was now commanded by a six-foot-six-inch Quaker, Brigadier General Solomon Meredith, who like Colonel Morrow, a southerner by birth, would soon be fighting against troops from his home state, North Carolina.

The 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan bivouacked in Greenmount, Pennsylvania the night of June 30, 1863, approximately six miles southwest of Gettysburg, setting out on the Emmitsburg Pike toward Gettysburg at about 8:00 A.M. on July 1.<sup>5</sup> The North Carolina regiment had been in the vicinity of Gettysburg for several days and in fact had been in Gettysburg on a reconnaissance mission on June 30. There the regiment briefly met with Union Brigadier General John Buford's cavalry which was camped in the town, whereupon it beat a hasty retreat because there were orders not to engage the enemy. The Tarheels spent the night of June 30 on picket duty just west of Marsh Creek on the Chambersburg Pike, about four miles west of Gettysburg. General Heth's division set out for Gettysburg about 5 A.M.<sup>6</sup> on a reconnaissance mission. Heth had received permission from Corps Commander A.P. Hill to gather any supplies he could but with specific orders from General Hill not to bring on a general engagement. The 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina marched near the rear of Pettigrew's Brigade which followed the brigades of Brigadier General Joseph Davis and Brigadier General James Archer also of A.P. Hill's Corps.<sup>7</sup>

General Buford's pickets opened fire on Heth's troops, actually the lead brigades of Archer and Davis, around 7:30 A.M., starting the battle. Unlike the Michigan soldiers, it is likely that the Tarheels may have been within hearing distance of this first shot. Buford's small force of pickets then joined their squadron which fought a delaying action as dismounted cavalry for several miles and then returned to McPherson's Ridge, northwest of Gettysburg, where Buford had set up his line of defense. McPherson's Ridge was located on the property of Gettysburg resident Edward McPherson, Republican Congressman for the district and former editor of the Pittsburgh Daily Times.<sup>8</sup> Because Heth had no idea that the entire Army of the Potomac was less than a day's march from Gettysburg, he continued to think for much of the morning that he was facing only a small cavalry force and local militia. Buford knew that Major General John Reynolds I Corps was only a few miles off, and hoped to fight a delaying action until Reynolds and the other Union Corps arrived. Buford had intended on using Seminary Ridge as a secondary line of defense which he would hold until the Army of the Potomac arrived. One thing is for sure, he did a brilliant job of defense and delay. At about 9:45 A.M., when Buford's troops were hotly engaged by Heth's troops coming down the Pike, Buford saw General Reynolds and his staff approaching on horseback in advance of his Corps. Buford may have been in the Lutheran Seminary cupola at the time. No one can verify the initial exchange between the two when they met, but Reynolds is said to have asked the troubled Buford what was wrong and how the battle was going whereupon Buford replied, "*the devil's to pay*". The two generals probably

<sup>5</sup> David Martin, Gettysburg, July 1, p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> Martin, Gettysburg, July 1, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> Martin, Gettysburg, July 1, p. 72.

<sup>8</sup> Glenn Tucker, Gettysburg, p. 105

met in the cupola to look over the battlefield while Reynold's Corps moved up toward Gettysburg.<sup>9</sup>

The 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan was first into action. As members of the First Division of the I Corps and bearers of the Division colors, the Iron Brigade had the honor of marching first in line and the troops had laughed about this when they set off in the morning and watched as the others ate their dust. In addition to the Michigan troops, the Iron Brigade was made up of the 6<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin, which would fight detached on the other side of the Chambersburg Pike that morning, the 7<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin, 2<sup>nd</sup> Wisconsin and 19<sup>th</sup> Indiana. As the Iron Brigade's troops approached Gettysburg, they began to hear guns near the junction of the Taneytown road. A horseman approached General Meredith with the news of the battle about a mile from the battlefield. The Iron Brigade proceeded in route step across the fields just past the Peach Orchard and the Wheat Field, near the Cordori House, all of which would be the site of hot action the next day, over Seminary Ridge to the sound of the guns. It was nearly 10 A.M. when the Midwesterners double-quickened into line near the crest of McPherson's Ridge with the 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan on the extreme left. General Reynold's himself was placing the troops as they came up the Ridge shouting, "*Forward men, for God's sake and drive those fellows out of those woods*".<sup>10</sup> It became a race to the woods.

The woods to which General Reynolds was referring was a group of trees on the east side of McPherson's Ridge, now known as McPherson's Woods. He had observed General Archer's troops approaching these woods. What Archer did not realize was that the vanguard of the Union I Corps was on its way up the other side of the Ridge and he had not taken the proper precautions to protect his right flank. Pettigrew's Brigade, as well as that of Colonel John Brockenborough, both of which might have done some good in support of Archer, were held in reserve by General Heth. General Archer's men were surprised when the Iron Brigade came pouring down the Ridge toward the Woods around 10 A.M. The familiar black hats were the first sign that the Confederates were up against the Army of the Potomac infantry and not local militia and dismounted cavalry. One Confederate soldier was heard to say "*— that ain't no milishy — that's them damned black-hatted fellows again !*".<sup>11</sup> Soon the 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan had overlapped Archer's right and charged into the Confederate's right and rear. There was a short time of savage, hand-to-hand fighting and many Confederates, including General Archer, were captured. During the charge of the Iron Brigade, General Reynolds, who had dangerously exposed himself to enemy fire, was killed instantly by a Confederate bullet not far from where he had directed the Iron Brigade into battle. By around 10:30 A.M. Major General O.O. Howard arrived in Gettysburg ahead of his XI Corps, which was soon to follow.<sup>12</sup>

There was a lull in the fighting between about Noon and 2 P.M.<sup>13</sup> Both sides took measures to reposition their troops. The Detroit troops had already lost their first color-bearer, Sgt. Abel Peck. Their Tarheel counterparts were still on Herr Ridge in reserve and though under fire for some time and taking some casualties from artillery fire, had not yet seen significant action. The 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina, behind Davis and Archer, was moved forward to a wooded area about 1/4 mile south of the Chambersburg Pike. Heth's line of battle spanned about 3/4 mile along the eastern slope of Herr Ridge,

<sup>9</sup> Martin, Gettysburg, July 1, p. 96.

<sup>10</sup> Davis, Boy Colonel, p. 301

<sup>11</sup> Curtis, Twenty-Fourth Michigan, p. 160.

<sup>12</sup> Tucker, Gettysburg, p. 122.

<sup>13</sup> Davis, Boy Colonel, p. 304.

parallel to a shallow body of water called Willoughby Run, about 500-800 yards off from the Run. Brockenborough's Brigade was lined up on the left, Pettigrew's Brigade in the center with the 26<sup>th</sup> on his extreme left and Archer's troops were to the right of Pettigrew. In the meantime, after General Reynolds' death, Brigadier General Abner Doubleday, commander of the I Corp's First Division was now in command of the entire Corps. After the action in the morning, he became personally involved in restructuring the line of battle of the I Corps. The Michiganders, especially since they had swung around to attack the flank and rear of Archer's troops, had to be pulled back. In a fateful move, the 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan was placed between the 19<sup>th</sup> Indiana and the 7<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin, thus changing its position so that the regiment was placed directly across from the 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina on the other side of Willoughby Run.

Both regiments were understandably anxious during the lull in the fighting. The Michiganders, along a 200 yard front, were exposed to artillery fire during the lull from Confederate artillery on Herr Ridge. Their regiment formed an awkward angle with its right bent back to meet the 7<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin and its left stretched back as well so that the troops on one end of the line could not see the troops on the other end of the line.<sup>14</sup> Colonel Morrow felt that his regiment was in an awkward, untenable position and asked Meredith several times to be repositioned. Each time he was refused. During the lull, four members of the 24<sup>th</sup> returned from sick leave and joined the regiment, not wanting to be left out of the fight. Within the hour, each of the four would lay on the field with a bullet wound, one of which proved to be mortal.<sup>15</sup> On the other side, Henry Burgwyn was very impatient to begin the fight and painfully aware of the frightful loss of time as the Union troops reinforced their position.<sup>16</sup> As usual in such situations, the troops were ludicrously told to rest up for the impending engagement as if any rest was possible. Despite the lull in the fighting, artillery boomed everywhere and the enemy which would soon be trying his best to kill you was but several hundred yards in your front. Pettigrew's Brigade stood about 400 hundred yards west of Willoughby Run with nothing but open field in front of it up to the Run. The Iron Brigade stood just east of Willoughby Run at the bottom of McPherson's Ridge.<sup>17</sup> The 24<sup>th</sup> stood at the edge of McPherson's Woods, a small wood running about 300 yards in depth from Willoughby Run to the top of McPherson's Ridge, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin actually stood in the Woods. There was a ravine alongside the Run where the 24<sup>th</sup> stood, which would become the first of six lines of battle.

Considering the larger size of the 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina, its right overlapped the Michigan regiment so that the soldiers on the regiment's right faced the 19<sup>th</sup> Indiana and at times the 151<sup>st</sup> Pennsylvania.<sup>18</sup> The total strength of the Michigan and Indiana regiments was about equal to that of the 26th. Pettigrew advanced his brigade "in line by echelon" between 2 P.M. and 2:30 P.M., so it appeared to the Northern troops that there were two lines of battle.<sup>19</sup> The well-trained Tarheel soldiers quickly stood up at the cry of "attention" and approached the mid-western troops in splendid order as if on parade. One soldier remarked that the regiment advanced in, "*as pretty and perfect a line as a regiment ever made, every man endeavoring to keep dressed on the colors*".<sup>20</sup> The Confederate troops were in firing range as soon as they advanced. Soon after the

<sup>14</sup> Martin, Gettysburg, July 1, p. 169.

<sup>15</sup> Curtis, Twenty-Fourth Michigan, p. 134.

<sup>16</sup> George C. Underwood, Twenty-Sixth Regiment from Clark's North Carolina Troops, p. 350.

<sup>17</sup> Tucker, Gettysburg, p. 146.

<sup>18</sup> Tucker, Gettysburg, p. 149.

<sup>19</sup> Underwood, Twenty-Sixth Regiment, p. 348.

<sup>20</sup> Tucker, Gettysburg, p. 350.

attack General Heth was wounded as was General Meredith, but both would live to fight another day. Major John T. Jones of the 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina's report of the role of Pettigrew's Brigade in the battle of Gettysburg contained the following account : "*The Brigade moved forward in beautiful style, in quick time, on a line with the brigade on our left commanded by Colonel Brockenborough. When nearing the Branch [Willoughby Run] the enemy poured a galling fire into the left of the brigade from the opposite bank where they had massed in heavy force, while we were in line of battle in the woods*".<sup>21</sup>

Colonel Morrow ordered his men to open fire as soon as the 26<sup>th</sup> stood up in line. The Tarheels advanced in order, largely unchecked from the first volley which, for the most part, went over their heads and then paused to return the fire. They immediately took a beating from Union artillery (Cooper's Battery) on Seminary Ridge which raked their entire line.<sup>22</sup> The Tarheel regiment lost two color bearers before reaching Willoughby Run. They continued to take heavy losses upon reaching the Run which ran through a ravine where many became entangled in the briars and underbrush, making them easy targets.

Colonel Morrow pulled his Michigan troops back from the Run in an orderly fashion and they began inching up the Ridge into McPherson's Woods. After crossing the Run, the Tarheels crowded toward the middle of the line making them easy targets again from the foe in their front and also the artillery on Seminary Ridge. By this time the troops were in such close proximity that they could hear the orders of the enemy's officers. It was at this second line of battle that the fighting between the two regiments was heaviest, near the middle of the Woods.<sup>23</sup> As the fight entered the Woods, it was characterized by slow, cautious movement. Few good officers will charge into a wood where the enemy's numbers and exact placement are unknown. The 52<sup>nd</sup> North Carolina, which had advanced, in echelon, behind the 26<sup>th</sup> in support, had done so largely unobserved by the Union troops.<sup>24</sup> The 52<sup>nd</sup> along with the 11<sup>th</sup> and 47<sup>th</sup> North Carolina regiments soon proved too much for the 19<sup>th</sup> Indiana and the Confederate troops moved around the left flank of the 19<sup>th</sup>, resulting in some very intense fighting which culminated in the Indiana regiment being forced back. Soon the Michigan troops found themselves in crossfire from the front and left. Captain Speed of Company D of the 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan turned his men to right angles to meet the 52<sup>nd</sup> North Carolina and "refuse the flank". Speed was promptly killed with a shot through the heart. Two more brave color-bearers of the 26<sup>th</sup> were killed. General Pettigrew, who was observing the action, sent a message to Colonel Burgwyn which said "*your regiment has covered itself with glory*".<sup>25</sup> Lieutenant Colonel John Lane of the 26<sup>th</sup> reported : "*The engagement was becoming desperate. It seemed as if the bullets were as thick as hailstones in a storm*".<sup>26</sup>

At this stage in the fighting, both regiments could have sought more favorable ground, or permission to withdraw with honor intact. In war there is a time to retreat, seek cover or even to run in circumstances which do not render a good soldier a coward. However, it was not in the makeup of these men to do so, not on this day. They were no braver than others, but they displayed an extraordinary combination of character,

<sup>21</sup> Official Records of the Civil War, Report of Major John T. Jones, 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina Regiment (27.2.642).

<sup>22</sup> Underwood, Twenty-Sixth Regiment, p. 351.

<sup>23</sup> Martin, Gettysburg, July 1, p. 352.

<sup>24</sup> Official Records of the Civil War, Report of Major John T. Jones, 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina Regiment 27.2.642).

<sup>25</sup> Underwood, Twenty-Sixth Regiment, p. 352.

<sup>26</sup> Davis, Boy Colonel, p. 328.

commitment to their leadership and a superior spirit and will to fight which made them pursue the conflict.

The Tarheels continued to advance as the Michiganders, hard-pressed and taking significant casualties, retreated one step at a time halfway up the Ridge, firing all the way. They stayed here but a short time and continued their orderly retreat up the Ridge. By this time, shortly after 3 P.M., only about 25% of them were still standing and fighting.<sup>27</sup> The two regiments were 20 paces apart. Colonel Burgwyn took the colors from another dead color-bearer of the 26<sup>th</sup>. He was immediately approached by Private Frank Honeycut who requested the colors from him, insisting that his Colonel should not carry the colors. As Colonel Burgwyn turned to hand the flag to him he was shot. The “boy colonel”, who was shot through both lungs, lived on an additional two hours. Honeycut was shot in the head as he retrieved the colors from the mortally wounded Burgwyn. The colors of the Tarheel regiment hit the dirt for the 13<sup>th</sup> time that day.

Further up the Ridge, Colonel Morrow took the colors to rally his troops to a new line of battle, their fifth. Private William Kelly approached Colonel Morrow to take the flag from him because “*the Colonel of the 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan shall never carry the colors while I am alive*”.<sup>28</sup> Kelly promptly dropped dead. Every foot was now contested while these determined soldiers blasted away at each other from short range. The 24<sup>th</sup> was nearly surrounded as the troops inched up the Ridge and out of the Woods toward Seminary Ridge. The last line of battle was established near the Lutheran Seminary. Colonel Morrow was holding the colors for the 24<sup>th</sup> with blood coming from his wounded head. He was forced to leave the field where he would be captured, though he escaped by the battle’s end. General Howard’s XI Corps on the other side of the Pike was in full retreat, exposing the I Corps right flank. Captain Edwards grabbed the flag and waived it for the final rally before General Doubleday ordered the retreat at about 3:45 P.M.

One wonders what would have happened if Doubleday had not ordered a retreat. This conjures up visions of Japanese soldiers found in the jungles of Asia still fighting World War II years after the war’s end because they had never gotten an order to surrender. Surely these regiments, which seemed so determined to exterminate each other rather than retreat, would have fought to the last man. As it was, they nearly did. The 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan lost 9 color-bearers killed or wounded and only 27 of its numbers answered the roll call on Culp’s Hill later that evening. Ultimately, 92 able-bodied members were found. The 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina lost 14 color-bearers and only 99 of its numbers were accounted for that evening and an additional 216 walking wounded. Both regiments suffered over 70% casualties that day, some of the highest casualties for both armies in any engagement of the war. The 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan sat out the rest of the battle. The 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina participated the third day in Picket’s/Pettigrew’s charge where over another 100 of its members would be lost. The two regiments would never fight again directly against each other but both participated in the battles of the Wilderness and Petersburg the next year. But even though the regiments bore the same regimental designations in those later engagements, it was not the same. The regiments that we remember left most of their numbers dead and wounded at McPherson’s Ridge.

<sup>27</sup> Official Records, Report of Colonel Henry A. Morrow, 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan Regiment (27.1.268).

<sup>28</sup> Curtis, Twenty-Fourth Michigan, p. 165.

The engagement between these two regiments has been described in various ways. Author Glenn Tucker called it the “battle of the Colonels”. O.B. Curtis, who authored the regimental history of the 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan called it a “*terrible battlefield duel*”. Henry Burgwyn’s biographer, Archie Davis entitled the chapter of the book dealing with his protagonist’s death, “*So Noble, So Glorious*”. When General Pettigrew sent the message to Colonel Burgwyn that his regiment had “*covered itself with glory*”, his observation was equally applicable to both regiments. This does not answer why these brave men fought to near extinction when other men would have sought cover or reformed under more favorable circumstances and still preserved their honor. Perhaps Curtis’s description of a “terrible battlefield duel” best described the tenacious character of the encounter between these regiments. After all, a duel is where two armed enemies stand in close proximity to settle a quarrel, the ultimate conclusion of which is that only one walks away alive. There is no honorable escape from a duel. In this sense, these men, fighting for their respective countries, were truly representative of the struggle which was the War Between the States. Certainly these fighting units both came to settle a quarrel that day and ultimately that quarrel would be settled by only one country walking away. However, as is the sometimes the case, this duel resulted in both enemies still standing ; bloodied but standing, with honor intact so that nearly 135 years later we continue to stand in awe of one of the most fascinating encounters in the annals of military history.

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