

The Civil War Record of Patrick Coleman

**Second Regiment
New York Heavy Artillery Volunteers**

August 15, 1861 - October 9, 1864

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**Defenses of Washington
Second Battle of Bull Run
Battle of Spotsylvania
Battle of North Anna River
Battle of Cold Harbor
Battle of Petersburg
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by George R. Angehr
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At the time the Civil War broke out in April, 1861, Patrick Coleman was living on the Lower East Side of New York, with his wife of six years, Ann, and their two children: Sarah, who was four years old, and baby Thomas, who had just turned one. Patrick, who was 26, was working as a teamster or a carman, driving a horsecart or trolley through the streets of New York. At 5'5", he was of medium height for the time, and had gray eyes, brown hair, and a dark complexion.

Although Coleman was not a native-born American, having probably arrived from county Sligo, Ireland about twelve years before in the aftermath of the Great Potato Famine, he was quick to sign up to fight for his adopted country. On August 15, he enlisted as a private for a term of three years in a unit called Governor Morgan's Light Artillery, (after the New York State Governor), at Camp Arthur, Staten Island. This was later merged with other units to form the Second Regiment of New York Heavy Artillery Volunteers. Coleman's company, commanded by Captain Abner C. Griffen, became Company I of the 2nd NYHA. Company I was mustered into service on Staten Island December 11, and left the state for Washington D.C. the next day. The Heavy Artillery units were responsible for manning the large-caliber guns of the forts that protected the Capital. The 2nd New York first went to Camp Upton, Virginia, and then was assigned to forts in Alexandria, Virginia, just south of Washington: Fort Ward in January and February 1862, and then Fort Worth, from March to August of that year.

The Second Battle of Bull Run: Fight at the Stone Bridge

The war at first went badly for the North. General George McClellan, the first commander of the Army of the Potomac, was very slow to launch an offensive against the Confederacy. He finally decided to try to take Richmond by moving his army by water to the James Peninsula and attacking the Rebel capital from the southeast. But due to McClellan's excessive caution, the "Peninsular Campaign" soon bogged down.

By the spring of 1862 Lincoln had lost confidence in McClellan. He decided to bring in General John Pope, who had a reputation for aggressiveness, from the west. Pope was given command of a new army, called the Army of Virginia, which was formed by consolidating three smaller Union armies based in northern Virginia. A decision was made to bring McClellan's Army of the Potomac back north from the James Peninsula and unite it with the Army of Virginia. This overwhelming force of 200,000 men would then have an easy job of defeating General Robert E. Lee's force of only 85,000 troops, and marching on to Richmond. The 2nd NYHA was assigned to the Reserve Corps of Pope's army in June 1862, but remained based in Washington.

By mid-August most of Pope's Army of Virginia had assembled to the east of the town of Manassas, Virginia, where they waited for the Army of the Potomac to join them from the south. This was near the site of the previous year's disastrous Union defeat at the Battle of Bull Run. Lee, who was still protecting Richmond from a possible attack by McClellan, realized that his only hope was to attack Pope's army before the two great Union armies could link up. While he remained facing McClellan, he sent part of his army under Stonewall Jackson far to the north, to attack the Federal base at Manassas between Pope's army and Washington.

The 2nd NYHA was sent out on August 26 from Washington to join Pope's army, and reached Centreville, a little north of Manassas, that evening. They were there only a short time when a Union officer rode up to tell them that Confederates were attacking the supply depot at Manassas, and to ask for their assistance in retaking the town. The next morning the 2nd New York attacked the town, completely unaware that they were actually facing Stonewall Jackson's whole army, rather than just a small raiding party. They soon found themselves up against odds of more than eight to one, and were forced to beat a hasty retreat. Joined by a few other Union regiments, they got caught up in a confused battle at the Bull Run bridge. Although only 7 soldiers of the regiment were wounded (one of whom later died), another 53 were reported missing in action.

The Second Battle of Bull Run itself began the afternoon of August 29, when Pope's army encountered Jackson's forces again. On August 30, Lee, who had by then linked up with Jackson again, attacked Pope and won the battle. Through outstanding generalship, Lee managed to confuse and outmaneuver the Union forces, and defeat a much larger army. On September 2, the Union armies were ordered back to Washington to defend the Capital. Lee's victory at Second Bull Run enabled him to mount his first invasion of the North, which was finally stopped by McClellan at Antietam on September 17. (Contrary to family legend, Patrick Coleman was not involved in the Battle of Antietam. Instead the 2nd New York was assigned to the defense of Washington at that time.)

Defenses of Washington: Garrison Soldier

The next 18 months were uneventful for the 2nd NYHA, although they would have been on alert during Lee's second invasion of the North, in July 1863, when he was finally defeated at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. After the Second Battle of Bull Run, they were assigned to a series of forts in the military district of Alexandria, Virginia: first Fort Haggerty, until October 1862; then Fort Woodbury, from October 1862 until October 1863; and finally, Fort C.F. Smith, from October 1863 until May 1864. However, the Confederate Army never seriously threatened the Capital, and the 2nd NYHA saw no action between September 1862 and May 1864. According to family legend, at one point Coleman's wife Ann sent him a turkey for Christmas - with a bottle of whiskey hidden inside.

By the end of 1863 the North was becoming desperate for men, especially trained soldiers. Various inducements were offered, including bounties, to get soldiers whose terms were due to expire to re-enlist. On December 22, 1863, Coleman took advantage of such an

offer. He was discharged from his previous term of service, which was due to expire in August 1864, and re-enlisted the next day as a "Veteran Volunteer," for an additional term of three years, at Fort Corcoran, Virginia. As a reward he was promised a \$400 bounty and a thirty-day furlough. He drew a \$62 payment on his bounty, plus \$13 in advance pay. On February 9, he received his furlough, and went to New York. This was probably the first time he had seen his family since December 1861. It was the last time they would see him alive.

Start of the Overland Campaign: Grant Goes into the Wilderness

In March 1864 General Ulysses S. Grant took over the command of all Union forces. Lincoln hoped he had finally found a "fighting general," aggressive enough to attack Lee but smart enough not to be led into a trap, as so many other Union commanders had been. Grant's major distinguishing characteristic, though, was that he was utterly relentless. No matter how bloody the fighting, no matter how many men fell, he would continue to move the army forward. Grant never looked back.

By late April the Union had 120,000 men assembled in northern Virginia. Grant accompanied the Army of the Potomac in the capacity of supreme Union commander, while the Army itself was commanded by General George Gordon Meade, the victor at Gettysburg. Some other Heavy Artillery units had already been converted to infantry and called up as part of Grant's "total mobilization," but for the time being the 2nd NYHA remained at its post at Fort C.F. Smith. On May 4, the Army of the Potomac crossed the Rapidan River to begin the series of bloody battles that became known as Grant's "Overland Campaign." On May 5, as the Army marched through an area of scrubby forest known as "The Wilderness," they were attacked by Lee's forces. For the next two days the fighting was ferocious. The Battle of the Wilderness cost the North 14,283 men killed and wounded and 3,383 captured, to 8,949 killed and wounded and 1,881 captured on the Confederate side.

For the previous two years, every other Union commander had turned back after such tremendous losses. The soldiers at first thought that Grant would do the same. But on the night of May 7, Grant began to move the army forward once more, towards the crossroads at Spotsylvania Court House. In the words of one soldier: "The rank and file of the army wanted no more retreating, and from the moment when we . . . continued straight on to Spotsylvania, I never had a doubt that General Grant would lead us on to final victory." As Grant and Meade rode by, many regiments broke into spontaneous cheers. Grant's statement of a few days later became famous: "I propose to fight it out upon this line if it takes all summer." As it turned out, it took much, much longer than that.

The Battle of Spotsylvania: "Friendly Fire"

To block Grant from circling around towards Richmond, Lee also moved his army south to Spotsylvania. Over the course of the next few days, the Confederate forces dug in, forming a curved line of entrenchments and fortifications known as "the Mule Shoe." The Union troops repeatedly attacked the Confederate lines in an attempt to break them. The most ferocious

attack took place on May 12, at a point in the Mule Shoe salient that gained the name "the Bloody Angle." On this day alone, the Union Army lost 6,820 men killed, wounded, or missing. But the Union assault failed, and the battle degenerated into a stalemate, with the two armies facing each other across fortified lines.

It was at this point that Grant called for reinforcements, to make up for the horrifying losses at the Wilderness and Spotsylvania. The 2nd NYHA, along with other Heavy Artillery regiments, was called up on May 15, boarded steamers, and sailed down the Potomac. They landed at Belle Plain, Virginia, and marched through Fredericksburg to the front. Many of the Heavy Artillery men were disgruntled. They had signed up for what they thought was a relatively safe branch of the service, but they now found themselves in the perilous infantry.

They did not receive a sympathetic welcome from the soldiers already in the field. For years the Heavy Regiments had had it easy in Washington, while the men of the Army of the Potomac had been bleeding and dying at Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg. Since they had so little to do and were readily available to be shown off to visiting VIPs, the "Heavies" were often called upon for official inspections and dress parades. The combat veterans looked down on them as "white glove outfits," "paper collar soldiers," or "band-box regiments." The Heavy Regiments were also unusually large, since it was relatively easy to recruit for units that did little marching and even less fighting. Although many other regiments numbered only a few hundred men, the 2nd NYHA had about 1,800 on its roster at this time. About 1,500 of them were on active duty and with the regiment when they took the field in late May.

Certainly the scene at Fredericksburg would not have given the new arrivals much confidence. By this time, Fredericksburg was one vast hospital, filled with Union wounded, stragglers, and rear echelon men, who enjoyed jeering the green troops. Recalled one member of a Heavy regiment, "The wounded seem to delight in making us as uncomfortable as possible. Our band was playing and one fellow said, 'Blow, you're blowing your last blast.'"

From Fredericksburg the Heavies marched south overnight to Spotsylvania, arriving in the early morning of May 18. The 2nd NYHA was assigned to the Second Corps of the Army of the Potomac, under the command of Major General Winfield Scott Hancock, who had saved the day at Gettysburg. This was one of the four infantry corps (the others being the Fifth, Sixth, and Ninth) and one cavalry corps that comprised the Army of the Potomac at this time. Within the Second Corps, the 2nd NYHA was assigned to a new Fourth Division, together with the 7th and 8th New York, the 1st Maine, and the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery Regiments. The Fourth Division, commanded by Brigadier General Robert O. Tyler, was also known as "Tyler's Heavy Artillery Division."

Tyler's men saw some action on May 18, when they stood in support of a bloody attack by Second and Sixth Corps men on a new Confederate line of defense across the base of the Mule Shoe, known as "Hell's Half-Acre." The attack stalled at barricades made of felled trees, where, according to one soldier, "The Artillery cut our men down in heaps." Although the Heavies did not take part in the attack itself, they had to endure a few stray shells and the sight

of horribly wounded survivors stumbling to the rear. When darkness came that night, the still-unbloodied Heavies returned to their camps.

Grant finally decided little more could be gained around Spotsylvania. He would disengage his army, circle around Lee, and move south again. During the night of the 18th, the Army of the Potomac began to move once more.

As the Army continued to move south on the afternoon of the 19th, Lieutenant General Richard Ewell, commanding the Second Corps of the Confederate Army, suddenly attacked its right rear flank. Because the Union command was not expecting an attack from the rear, they had assigned the new troops just in from Washington to this part of the column. The 4th New York Heavy Artillery bore the brunt of the first attack along the Fredericksburg Road near the Harris farm at around 4 PM, being reinforced by the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery a little before 6 PM. Soon more Heavy regiments, including the 2nd New York, came up to help, but in the smoke and confusion they did more harm than good. The 2nd New York, trying to support the 1st Massachusetts, fired one good volley that hit as many Federals as Confederates. Even worse, one wing of the 1st Massachusetts overlapped the other and fired into its own line. The confusion became so great that one officer summed it up: "First there was Kitching's brigade firing at the enemy; then Tyler's men fired into his; up came Birney's division and fired into Tyler's; while the artillery fired at the whole d---d lot."

As night fell, the Confederates disengaged and slipped back to their entrenchments around Spotsylvania. By 10 PM, the firing sputtered out. It was a costly initiation for the Heavies. Union casualties were 1,535 killed, wounded, or missing, versus about 900 for the Confederates. The 2nd New York lost 26 men killed or died of wounds; 89 wounded and recovered; and two missing in action.

Strategically, the fighting was inconsequential, serving only to delay Grant's departure for one day. But it at least earned the Heavies the respect of the veterans for their courage under fire. An old-timer came up to one of the Heavies and said, "Well, you can fight [even] if you did come out of the forts." Another soldier noted, "After Spotsylvania I never heard a word spoken against the heavy-artillery men." A Union officer said to a war correspondent who asked his opinion, "Well, after a few minutes they got a little mixed and didn't fight very tactically, but they fought confounded plucky." Altogether, Spotsylvania was the most costly battle of the Overland Campaign. Grant lost 16,141 men killed or wounded and 2,258 captured, while Lee's forces lost 6,519 killed or wounded and 5,543 captured.

The Battle of North Anna River: A Narrow Escape

At 11 PM on May 20, Hancock's Second Corps, including the 2nd NYHA, resumed its march south from Spotsylvania. They reached the Mattaponi River at noon the next day and camped. The rest of the Army of the Potomac followed in stages. On May 23, the Army approached the North Anna River along a wide front. On the morning of May 24, Hancock's forces took the Chesterfield Bridge across the North Anna against light Confederate opposition and crossed the river.

As it turned out, this was a trap set by Lee. Once across the river, Hancock found himself facing two of Lee's best corps, separated from the rest of the army with his back to the river. If Lee had been able to attack at this moment, Hancock's forces would have been in serious trouble, and Grant's army could have suffered a critical defeat. But Hancock was saved by a lucky chance. At this vital point, Lee was taken severely ill and confined to his tent. He would not allow his subordinate commanders, none of whom had his complete confidence, to take charge of such a crucial attack.

Given a reprieve, Hancock's men first entrenched to protect their position, then withdrew to the north bank of the North Anna on the night of May 25. The Army of the Potomac regrouped, then began moving south again further to the east. Overall, fighting around the North Anna had cost 1,973 Union men killed and wounded and 165 captured, to 690 Confederates killed or wounded and 561 captured.

On May 28, the army crossed Pamunkey Creek, and on May 29 Hancock pushed on to Totopotomoy Creek. Here he found Confederate forces well entrenched, and on May 30 engaged in a long-range artillery duel. Later in the day, the Confederates attacked the Union forces, but were repulsed. Lee's forces lost 811 killed and wounded and 348 captured, to 679 killed and wounded and 52 captured on the Union side. Between the actions at the North Anna and the Totopotomoy, the 2nd NYHA lost 21 killed or died of wounds, 67 wounded and seven missing in action.

On May 29 the Second Corps was reorganized, and the 2nd New York was reassigned within it. The regiment was shifted from Tyler's command to the First Division of the Second Corps, under the command of Brigadier General Francis C. Barlow, where they formed part of the First Brigade, under Colonel Nelson A. Miles. (Many years later during the Indian Wars, Miles became famous as the captor of Geronimo.)

The Battle of Cold Harbor: "We Knew It Meant Slaughter to Make the Attempt."

On May 31 Lee sent some of his troops south to take Old Cold Harbor, a crossroads only 12 miles away Richmond, where Grant could be blocked from moving on the Confederate capital. (The odd name is derived from camping places for travelers found along the highways of England, and means "shelter without fire.") Recognizing the strategic importance of the site, Grant quickly sent his cavalry under General Phil Sheridan to take it over. The cavalry managed to hold it until additional Union reinforcements were brought up on the afternoon of June 1. Fierce fighting took place late in the day.

Hancock's troops, however, were still well to the east. Grant ordered them to join up, but nothing went right. They marched through the night, but according to one soldier, it was "one of the most trying experiences. It was very dark and very warm, the dust stifling and no water to be had. The road was unknown, and Captain Paine . . ., who was sent to lead the

column and show the way, got the troops entangled in paths where artillery could not follow, and much time was lost." Hancock was unable to reach Cold Harbor by daybreak as planned.

Barlow's division, which now included the 2nd NYHA, was the first of Hancock's Corps to arrive at Cold Harbor. The day was already hot. The men were in a state of exhaustion, and ashamed at being behind time. When told that the name of the place was "Cold Harbor," an Irish private in the 2nd NYHA remarked that "'twas no harbor at all, and divil a drop of water to make 'un wid." Grant initially set a general assault for 4 PM, but because of the heat and the total exhaustion of the men, the attack was postponed until dawn the next day.

It was a fateful delay. Although it gave the Union forces time to rest, it also gave the Confederates a chance to dig in. They entrenched, dug rifle pits, and built stout breastworks. By this time, the men of the Army of the Potomac knew all too well what it meant to charge fortified enemy lines. Many men wrote their names and addresses on slips of paper and pinned them to the backs of their coats, so their families could be notified if they were killed the next morning. Their discomfort that night was increased by a heavy rain that began to fall about 5 PM.

Although Grant knew the opposing line had been fortified, he thought a frontal assault had a chance to break through, and allow him to crush Lee once and for all. He decided to gamble. But as the Union troops moved into position before dawn, a few got a glimpse of the positions they would have to charge. One soldier wrote, "We knew it meant slaughter to make the attempt; and gloomy forebodings settled down over the whole regiment."

At 4:30 AM, amidst low mists and fog, the Union attack began with a tremendous cannonade. At 4:40 AM, Barlow's division led the first wave of the charge into the enemy fortifications, surging out of the woods onto a broad and level field that crossed over a sunken road and then ran in a smooth, even slope up to the works. One soldier later wrote that he saw a line of slouch hats pop up along the Confederate parapets, and then "the works glowed brightly with musketry, a storm of lead and iron struck the blue line, cutting gaps in it." The Union cannonade and the fusillade of Confederate musketry were so fierce that they could be heard 12 miles away in Richmond.

Barlow's first advance had some initial success, pouring across a row of rifle pits and capturing two cannon and a number of prisoners. But the troops got ahead of the main Union line, and without support on either side, were soon driven back. Under blistering enemy fire, men fell in droves. Ordered to fall back a short distance, many kept retreating; once started out of the inferno, they were not about to stop. They moved back as far as the sunken road they had crossed earlier. It was much the same along the entire line of battle - a charge into withering fire, a brief advance that could not be sustained, and then retreat.

The second wave of the charge also stalled under severe fire. Gradually, between 5 and 8 AM, the Union offensive ground to a halt. The troops began to dig in, putting up breastworks, often only 100 feet from the Confederate fortifications. Although told to renew the assault,

many commanders, dismayed by the carnage, ignored or refused the order. Barlow and other division commanders told Hancock that any further attack was "inadvisable."

Between the lines, the ground was covered black with Union dead. Even a young Confederate soldier wrote home, "I think that this will be one of the most awful battles that has ever been fought in this war." According to many accounts, more than 6,000 Union soldiers fell in just the first hellish 30 minutes. (Official figures show that the Union lost at least 1,100 killed and 4,517 wounded that day. For perspective, compared to Cold Harbor, D-Day was a pleasant stroll on the beach. U.S. forces took only about 2,500 casualties in storming Hitler's Atlantic Wall.) Years later, Ulysses Grant - never known for remorse - confessed, "I have always regretted that the last assault at Cold Harbor was ever made." It was the only time Grant admitted to having made a mistake. It was also the worst defeat of his career.

From June 4 to 12, the two armies faced each other across their fortifications under great tension. Anything that moved between the lines was shot. For more than four days the wounded lay where they fell, and the dead rotted. Finally a truce was arranged between 6 and 8 PM on June 7, so the few wounded who still survived could be brought in and the dead could be buried.

Between June 1 and 12, Grant had lost 12,475 killed or wounded and 2,456 captured, compared to only 3,765 killed and wounded and 1,082 captured on the Confederate side. The 2nd New York lost 39 killed or died of wounds, 157 wounded, and 19 captured. Instead of savior of the Union, Grant was now being called a butcher. In just over a month, from the Battle of the Wilderness on May 5 to the end of Cold Harbor on June 12, Grant had lost more than 54,000 men killed, wounded, or captured - almost half the force he had started out with. When someone after Cold Harbor asked Hancock where the Second Corps was, he replied, "It lies buried between the Rapidan and the James."

But Grant and Lincoln both realized that they were now engaged in a war of attrition. Although Lee had lost fewer men over the same period - about 32,000 - the South had no way of replacing these losses. Although more Northern blood was being shed, the South by now had almost no blood left to give.

The Battle of Petersburg: Missed Opportunity

Even though he was now so close to Richmond, Grant chose not to try to take the city directly. Instead, he decided to circle around far to the south, and try to capture Petersburg. Petersburg was a major rail junction where four railroads from the south, east, and west joined and linked up with Richmond to the north. If Petersburg could be captured, Richmond would be cut off from its supply lines and would soon fall.

The Army of the Potomac began to move out from in front of Lee's fortifications during the night of June 12. They managed to move so secretively that Lee was surprised to find them gone in the morning - and furious because he had no idea what Grant was planning next.

Hancock's corps had a long hard march on June 13th, a scorching day. By the evening of the 13th, the Army arrived at Wilcox's Landing on the north bank of the broad James River. The Second Corps was the first to cross the James the next day, using a flotilla of Navy ships, river transports, and even New York ferry boats. Vehicles and horses crossed on a pontoon bridge more than a third of a mile long.

Hancock's corps started south from the James at 10:30 AM on June 15, while the rest of the army continued to cross - a move that would not be completed until the morning of the 17th. The march to Petersburg was slow and dull. According to one soldier, "It was intensely hot. The roads were dusty, and the color of the soldiers' uniforms could not be distinguished. The men suffered for lack of water Many . . . fell out of the ranks, prostrated by the heat."

At around 5:30 PM, Hancock received a message from Grant. Reconnaissance had shown that Petersburg was more lightly defended than had been supposed. If Hancock could come up quickly, he might be able to take the city that same night, together with General William Smith's Eighteenth Corps, which had come from another Union position further up the James River. The Second Corps was ordered to move forward swiftly.

Hancock arrived near Petersburg about 9 PM, although some of the Second Corps, including Barlow's division, were still behind on the road. But due to miscommunication between Hancock and Smith, no attack was made that night. In the meantime, Confederate troops under General Pierre Beauregard arrived and were able to reinforce the city's defenses.

The Union forces did not finally manage to mount a concerted offensive on the defenses to the northeast of Petersburg until June 17. An attack in the early morning, at 3 AM, had some success, but follow-up offensives in the afternoon, in which Hancock's corps participated, made little progress. The Union forces attacked again on June 18, but by that time Lee's main army was finally arriving in the city. The Second Corps tried to advance again, but was hit hard and stopped. The army began to entrench in front of the Confederate fortifications. Between June 15 and 18, the Union lost 8,150 men killed and wounded and 1,814 missing, while the Confederates lost about 4,000.

On Sunday, June 19, the Union Army was given a well-earned day of rest. The next day Grant began to put his new plan in action, to completely surround the city and besiege it. The men of the Second Corps (now under the command of Major General David Birney, Hancock having been taken ill) and those of the Sixth Corps were pulled from the trenches, in preparation for sending them around the south side of Petersburg to encircle it.

The Disaster at Jerusalem Plank Road: ". . . as Lightning Shrivels the Dead Leaves of Autumn."

On the morning of June 21, the Second and Sixth Corps moved westward towards the Jerusalem Plank Road, which ran south from Petersburg. At first the men were relieved, since they thought they were headed away from the battle front on some easy mission. But they soon were bitterly disillusioned, as they began to turn back in the direction of the front and

realized they were going into the fight once again. The Federal column reached the Plank Road a little after midday and began entrenching for two miles along its length.

On the next day, the plan was for the Sixth Corps, on the south end of the line, and the Second Corps, forming a link between the Sixth and the entrenched Fifth Corps on the north, to swing west as far as the Weldon Railroad and then north, closing in on the Confederate lines guarding Petersburg's south side. The trick was for the two corps to maintain a solid, unbroken front during the maneuver. Any gap between the two would allow the Confederates to break through and make a flank attack.

The Second Corps moved out and pivoted west and then north according to plan, but the Sixth was slower, and began moving only westward. Barlow's Division, including the 2nd NYHA, was at the far end of the Second Corps line, and was responsible for maintaining the connection with the Sixth. General Meade, who at this point was directing the overall operations around Petersburg, became impatient with the delays and ordered the Second Corps to continue making its move independently of the Sixth. Under these orders Barlow allowed his tenuous link with the Sixth Corps to break. The Sixth became further delayed when they encountered Confederate skirmishers. Soon what everyone had feared might happen had happened: a large gap separated the Second Corps from the Sixth Corps.

The Confederates were not slow to take advantage of this golden opportunity. Major General William Mahone, commanding a division of Lieutenant General A.P. Hill's Third Army Corps opposite the Union advance, had surveyed the area before the war and knew of a large ravine that ran from the Confederate lines to the south of the Second Corps' position. It should be possible to infiltrate a force down the ravine to strike the enemy flank.

Mahone chose three of his brigades for the assignment. They marched through the deep ravine to a thick wood, which prevented the Union troops from observing them. A little after 3 PM, giving the piercing "rebel yell," they burst through the thick undergrowth upon the line of bluecoats. They ran into a crossfire and reeled back. Then they regrouped and came on again, this time decisively. In one Confederate's words, "with a wild yell which rang out shrill and fierce through the gloomy pines, Mahone's men burst upon the flank - a pealing volley, which roared along the whole front - a stream of wasting fire, under which the adverse left [flank] fell as one man - and the bronzed veterans swept forward, shriveling up Barlow's division as lightning shrivels the dead leaves of autumn."

Barlow's division, taken by surprise and unable to defend itself, simply disintegrated. According to one New York soldier, "When we think of the many struggles our men had with unknown foes in the woods, and the disasters which often followed, it is easy to account for the distrust we felt as we entered such places . . . and so it resulted here for, when the enemy flanked us on the left, a panic ran along the line from left to right . . ." According to another soldier from Maine, "This was a case of run or be gobbled." The stampede spread quickly down the line. Regiment after regiment broke and ran.

The Second Corps fell back in confusion, but eventually managed to make a stand at the fortifications on the Jerusalem Plank Road where they had started. The Confederate advance ran out of steam, partly because the attacking brigades "had been severely depleted in carrying off prisoners." Although only 650 Union soldiers were killed or wounded in the action, an enormous number of prisoners - 1,742 - were swallowed up by the Confederate attack. Although specific losses of the 2nd NYHA for the day are not recorded, 59 men went missing in action between June 15 and 23 - most of them probably captured on the 22nd. In addition to those captured, between June 15 and 23 the 2nd NYHA lost 72 men killed or died of wounds, and 175 wounded - their worst losses of the entire war.

The 2nd NYHA may have tried to make a futile stand as a few regiments did. Perhaps they broke and ran like most of the others. Whatever the case, Patrick Coleman did not make it back to the lines. He was among the hordes of prisoners taken on that day, and was reported missing in action at roll-call the next day. He had been at the front only 36 days. In that brief time his regiment had lost 733 men killed, wounded, or captured. Of the 1,500 men who had started out in May, nearly half had been lost in just over a month!

Coleman and the others prisoners were sent on up to Richmond on June 24, then on to Lynchburg, Virginia on June 29. Sometime after that date he was shipped off to the place where he would meet his death, a place that was nothing less than Hell on Earth: Andersonville Prison Camp, Georgia.

(Coleman's war was over, but the siege of Petersburg went on. It took far longer to take the city than Grant ever expected. The siege dragged on through the rest of that hot summer, into the fall, and through the winter. The city did not fall until the next spring, on April 3, 1865. As expected, it meant the end of the Confederacy. Lee's Army fled west, finally surrendering at Appomattox Courthouse only a few days later, on April 9, 1865. The 2nd NYHA, having served all through the siege of Petersburg, was present at Lee's surrender.)

Andersonville Prison Camp: Twelve Acres of Hell

Patrick Coleman probably arrived in Andersonville in early July. Like many other new arrivals, he would have been plunged into despair at his first sight of that vast pit of human misery. He was thrust into a huge pen, crammed with more than 26,000 ragged, emaciated men, many in the last stages of starvation. Scattered on the ground lay hundreds of dead and dying. The hot, heavy air was saturated with the stench of death, gangrene, and human waste. Andersonville Prison was the closest thing to a death-camp ever to exist in North America.

The prison, officially known as Camp Sumter, was constructed in February 1864 in the red-clay country south of Macon, Georgia. It was nothing more than an open stockade, 1000 feet long by 800 feet wide, with 20-foot walls built of thick, squared pine logs sunk vertically in the ground. The Confederates provided no barracks or other housing for the prisoners. Instead, the men had to scrounge branches or scraps of wood to build crude huts, or else make tents of blankets or coats, if they had any. Especially after the prison became crowded, many

men had no shelter at all from the blazing sun or pouring rain. The only source of water was a sluggish stream, a yard wide and a few inches deep, that ran through the center of the stockade. Since this also served as a latrine for tens of thousands of men, it soon became a putrid swamp of unspeakable filth.

When the first prisoners were moved in in February, there was plenty of room. But as the summer started, new prisoners began to pour in, captured during the Overland Campaign and Sherman's battles around Atlanta. The situation was worsened by Grant's decision in April to halt the periodic prisoner-of-war exchanges that had gone on with the Confederacy since the start of the war. The North realized that giving the South back its fighting men would just prolong the war. Since the North could better afford the losses, the Union prisoners were allowed to rot in prison. By the time of Coleman's arrival the prison was incredibly overcrowded. At that point Andersonville contained about 26,400 prisoners, in a habitable area of only 12 acres. Each man had less than 20 square feet - a space only six feet long by three feet wide!

The Confederates provided only a starvation diet. At the beginning the prisoners received a quart of cornmeal each day, with some salt meat, a sweet potato, and perhaps some cowpeas. By the time that Coleman arrived, the daily ration had been reduced to half of one small loaf of cornbread, perhaps containing a cup of cornmeal. They prisoners might get a scrap of salt meat once a month. The cornmeal was coarsely ground and hard to digest. The diet entirely lacked several essential vitamins. Many prisoners developed scurvy, a vitamin C deficiency brought on by the lack of fresh fruits or vegetables. The first symptoms were swollen, bleeding gums, and loosening teeth which eventually fell out. Ulcers appeared on the skin. Later, the joints became swollen, first the ankles and then the knees. Once a sufferer's knees were affected and he could no longer walk, he usually soon died. Diarrhea, dysentery, and dropsy were epidemic due to the polluted water, and poor sanitation and lack of medical care resulted in many prisoners developing gangrene from even minor injuries.

The prison guards were the dregs of the Confederate forces. Since nearly every able-bodied man was at the front, the guards were made up of old men, teenage boys, and the unfit. Many, embittered, were happy to take advantage of any excuse to shoot a Yankee. A few yards inside the prison wall, a flimsy barrier was constructed of posts with a thin board running along the top. To discourage escape, there were standing orders to shoot any prisoner venturing between the stockade wall and this barrier - the "dead-line." Guards would often shoot a prisoner even close to the dead-line without warning or provocation. Prisoners tried to get water from the stream as close as possible to the wall where it entered, where it was least polluted. Many were killed there for approaching the dead-line too closely.

The conditions at Andersonville were partly due to the fact that the South was running out of supplies, and could scarcely feed even its own troops. But they also resulted from at best callousness, and at worst deliberate policy, on the part of the Confederate administration. By ill-treatment of the Union prisoners, the Confederacy may have been trying to pressure the Federal government into resuming prisoner exchanges. General John Winder, Commissary

General of Prisoners and head of the Confederate prison camp system, was known for his intense hatred of the North. He boasted that he was "killing off more Yankees than 20 regiments in Lee's army." Captain Henry Wirz, originally from Switzerland, was the commandant of Andersonville. He was notorious for his arbitrary cruelty and for his nearly insane rages. After the war, Wirz became the only man to be executed for war crimes in U.S. history. Winder would probably have met the same fate, but he died shortly before the war's end.

Just about the time of Coleman's arrival, a conflict within the prison was reaching a crisis. The Confederates made no attempt to keep order among the prisoners, and left the men to their own devices. Criminal elements among them, many of them from the slums of New York, preyed on the weaker prisoners. They were known as "Raiders," who would rob or even kill new arrivals and other prisoners for their money, equipment, or food. A man who lost his food or his blanket in Andersonville was as good as dead. Organized into gangs, the Raiders terrorized the other inmates.

Finally the other prisoners had enough. A group of westerners, calling themselves "Regulators," organized a vigilante squad and struck back. On July 3, they conducted a surprise attack on the Raiders, and captured 125 of them, including most of the ringleaders. Wirz had given permission for and encouraged the attack, since the disorder produced by the Raiders was an inconvenience for him. Between July 5 and 7, the Regulators held formal courts-martial of the accused. Six of the Raider ringleaders were sentenced to death for murder and other crimes, while others were forced to run the gauntlet and others shackled with ball-and-chain. On July 11, a gallows was constructed in the center of the prison, and the condemned men were hanged by the other prisoners.

In July another 7,100 prisoners poured into Andersonville. Another 1,800 died, bringing the prison population to 31,700. The crowding was somewhat alleviated, though, by the construction of a new 600-foot long section which increased the prison area to 20 acres. The prison population peaked at 33,114 on August 8th. That month 3,076 died. As the dog-days of that hot summer dragged on, the death rate rocketed, from one man out of every 19 in July, to one out of every 11 in August - almost 100 per day. In August, though, the prison was also visited by what many prisoners believed was a miracle of Providence. A new freshwater spring burst from the ground on the north side of the polluted creek, so at least the men now had clean water to drink.

Finally, on September 6, the men were electrified by the announcement that there would be a general prisoner exchange with the Union. Over the next two days thousands of men were formed into ranks and marched out of the prison. However, only those who could walk under their own power were allowed to go. Those who were too sick to move had to stay on in Andersonville.

But it was only a cruel ruse by the Confederates. On September 2, Atlanta had finally fallen to Sherman's Army. The Confederates were afraid that the Union Army would send a rescue column to liberate the prisoners, replenishing the Federal ranks with thousands of

soldiers. The prisoners who could be of any value to the North were moved to other prison camps out of range of rescue, and only the near-dead were left behind. Those who left found that conditions in the new camps were at least better than those in Andersonville. But many thousands still continued to die in the new camps of the after-effects of the mistreatment they had already received.

It was already too late for Coleman. Although he had been a prisoner only a little more than two months, like many others he had deteriorated rapidly. He was one of those left behind - he must already have been too weak to walk. Although Sherman knew well about Andersonville and the conditions there, no rescue mission ever was sent. On September 27, Patrick Coleman was brought into the prison hospital outside the stockade walls, suffering from scurvy (listed as "scorbutus" in the hospital record). The hospital at Andersonville was more a place to die rather than a place to get well - 70% of the prisoners who entered the hospital died there. There was scarcely any medicine, and the only treatment available for scurvy was a handful of sumac berries.

By September 30, there were only 8,218 prisoners left at Andersonville, most of the others having been moved out. During the month of October, 4,500 died - more than half of those who remained. Coleman was one of them, dying in the hospital on October 9. He was buried in grave No. 13149, without a coffin, in a long trench with hundreds of others. Of the 45,613 Union prisoners who had entered Andersonville, 12,912, or 29%, died there - not even considering the thousands who died shortly after being transferred. In November, the Confederacy finally relented, and returned some of the sickest survivors of Andersonville to the Union. Photos of their condition horrified the North.

Patrick Coleman's career at the front was brief, but it distilled the full range of horrors of the Civil War. From the confused melees at Second Bull Run and Spotsylvania, to the futile suicide charge at Cold Harbor, to the humiliating rout at Petersburg, and ending in a miserable death in the abyss of Andersonville, his experience could not be summed up better than in William Tecumseh Sherman's words: "*War is Hell.*"

SOURCES:

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