

MONUMENT commemorating the
heroic charge of the
First Minnesota, erected
at Gettysburg in 1897



The Battle of GETTYSBURG as seen by *Minnesota Soldiers*

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IN THE CENTURY since it was fought on July 1-3, 1863, the battle of Gettysburg has held a strong claim on the imagination of the American people. It has probably inspired more historical prose, verse, and controversy than any other engagement on this continent. When President Abraham Lincoln dedicated the battlefield as a national cemetery on November 19, 1863, he made the conflict a symbol not only of heroic sacrifice, but also of mankind's struggle to preserve the democratic form of government.

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From the military historian's point of view, Gettysburg is not of crucial strategic importance. It became the site of combat when the Union and Confederate armies accidentally made contact on July 1; neither General George G. Meade nor General Robert E. Lee deliberately chose to fight on the ridges and hills south of the little Pennsylvania market town. Though the Union forces won a decisive and costly victory, they failed to take full advantage of it, and two more years of bitter warfare were necessary before Lee surrendered.

Gettysburg did, however, represent the turning of the tide for Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia. The Union Army of the Potomac, which had been defeated three

times in the previous twelve months, stood its ground and forced Lee to retreat into Southern territory. For both sides, the engagement was memorable as the largest ever fought on the North American continent, both in the number of men involved and in the casualties incurred. More than 165,000 troops took the field, and the totals of killed and wounded exceeded 40,000.¹

The battle has long been of special interest to Minnesotans because of the great bravery and heavy losses of the First Minnesota Regiment, which took part in the fighting on the second and third days. The exploits of the First Minnesota, particularly its heroic charge of July 2, have been recorded in official history and memorialized in verse and painting. This account attempts to describe the battle as it appeared to a few of the enlisted men who took part, men who set down their impressions in diaries, let-

ters, and reminiscences which are preserved in the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society. Quite understandably, these fragmentary records reveal widely differing views of exactly what happened, but they have one thing in common: they suggest with vividness the firsthand experience of the participants.

BY EARLY SUMMER of 1863 the troops of the First Regiment of Minnesota Volunteers were veterans of two years of fighting. About nine hundred men had been mustered in at Fort Snelling during the last days of April, 1861; by 1863 the size of the regiment had, in one way and another, been reduced more than half. For this remnant, now under the command of Colonel William Colvill of Red Wing, the Gettysburg campaign began in Virginia on June 15.²

After forcing General Joseph Hooker to retreat at the battle of Chancellorsville, Lee boldly seized the opportunity to invade the North and marched through the Shenandoah Valley into Pennsylvania. The Army of the Potomac followed northward, keeping east of Lee's forces in order to protect Baltimore and Washington. The First Minnesota formed part of the Second Division of General Winfield S. Hancock's Second Corps, which was the last unit of the Union army to start north.

One of the men who made the march was Sergeant James A. Wright, who had been before he enlisted a student at Hamline University, then located in Red Wing. In the history of Company F which he was to set down later, Wright described the beginning of the trek from Virginia: "It was one of the heart-breaking marches of our

COLONEL *William Colvill*



¹ Kenneth P. Williams, *Lincoln Finds a General: A Military Study of the Civil War*, 2:720, 721 (New York, 1949).

² For a general account of the regiment, see William Lochren, "Narrative of the First Regiment," in *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:1-48 (St. Paul, 1890). A more recent study is John Q. Imholte, *The First Volunteers: History of the First Minnesota Volunteer Regiment, 1861-1865* (Minneapolis, 1963).



A column of Union soldiers halted for a rest during a long march

experience and many men wilted in the scorching heat and dust like mown grass. . . . There were a number of cases of fatal sunstroke, and some dying almost as quickly as if struck by a bullet in a vital part. All of the ambulances were filled with helpless men and those left behind were coming in all of the first part of the night.”³

On June 20 a young corporal, Charles E. Goddard, wrote to his mother in Winona with typical understatement: “Since I last wrote we have been doing some ‘tall’ marching. There has been no less than 70 men fell dead out of this Corps . . . caused by hard marching and excessive heat.”⁴

Along the way the Union troops were harassed by skirmishers on their flanks. Sergeant Wright remembered that on the morning of June 25 firing began at daylight. “Arrangements were made to repel attacks from the rear or flanks, and the march began,” he wrote. “It was not exactly raining, but the air was surcharged with a descending moisture that saturated our clothing and

obscured everything, at a distance of 200 or 300 yards. For a time we were allowed to proceed in peace, then a series of desultory, nagging attacks began on the flanks and rear—first at one point, then another. These were made by mounted men who attacked suddenly; galloping out of the enshrouding fog and mist, firing a volley or two and riding away again into the blending clouds of smoke and vapor; or behind a sheltering hill or grove, as soon as they met a return fire. . . . Twice our regiment shifted its formation from a marching column to a line of battle and hurried to the support of the skirmishers, but it never got near enough to [General J.E.B.] Stuart’s nimble horsemen to fire a shot.

“[Later] they used artillery for the first time that morning. From a hill on our right, as we marched, they fired in rapid succession obliquely across the line of march. The column was halted and some regiments detached to go after them, and meantime their fire continued. Several of their shells were sufficiently depressed to do damage and one of them struck the hind legs of Col. Colvill’s horse, tumbling man and horse into the muddy road. Fortunately the colonel was able to clear his feet from the stirrups and quick-witted enough to roll out of the way of the struggling animal. He got to his feet without suffering any serious injury, but he was well-plastered with a coating of dull red, Virginia mud.” When the column

³ Wright, “The Story of Company F, the First Regiment,” 538, in the Minnesota Historical Society. This history, written between 1909 and 1911, was based in part on Wright’s diaries and letters to his mother. After the war he moved to Massachusetts.

⁴ Goddard’s letters are in the Orrin F. Smith and Family Papers, in the Minnesota Historical Society. Goddard returned to Minnesota after the war and died in 1868, shortly after his election to the office of register of deeds for Winona County.

moved forward again, Colvill "with some of his personal effects across his arm . . . was in his place at the head of the regiment and continued the march on foot."⁵

The weather remained hot and sultry, with occasional rain. The men were called out at daybreak and stood in line ready to march soon after breakfast. Wright described their appearance on June 27: "Our clothing was wet and spattered and smeared with mahogany colored mud. The moisture, the sand, and the sharp stones of the road, which the wheels of the artillery and the [wagon] trains had broken up badly, had been very destructive to shoe leather. Men who had left the Rappahannock twelve days before, with new shoes on their feet, were now practically bare-footed; and there were quite a number with feet so badly bruised or blistered that they walked like foundered horses." Wright also described their equipment: "Each soldier carried a rifle which, with bayonet &c. weighed about 11 pounds. Also 100 rounds of ammunition, knapsack, haversack, canteen, coffee pot and whatever cooking utensils he had; his blanket, tent cloth, rubber [sheet], all extra clothing and whatever else he might have — writing paper, envelopes, keepsakes or a book . . . full 40 pounds."⁶

The First had a day of rest in northern Virginia and, like ordinary tourists, Colonel Colvill, his orderly, and Sergeant Wright went to look at the nearby battlefield of Bull Run, where, in July, 1861, the regiment had seen its first combat. The Union army had fought a second engagement there in August, 1862, in which the First did not participate. Wright found the battlefield a grim sight. "Many of the dead had not been buried for some days . . . and then covered where they lay; and even this had not been done with overmuch care, and we frequently saw partly exposed skeletons, where the washing of the rain or rooting of the hogs had uncovered them. On a recently cut stump some grim jester had set a skull, as if in mockery of a real sentry. Much of the skin was still on it — dried and shrunken

— and a bullet had passed through it from the right temple to a point above the left ear. There was nothing to indicate the color of the uniform he had worn."⁷

In spite of the hardships of the march, the morale of the enlisted men remained high. Private Goddard wrote to his widowed mother, thanking her for a pair of kid gloves she had sent: "they was most to large, but that dose not make much difference for I can ware them any how. . . . We have heard here that the Rebs are up in Chambersburg [Pennsylvania] and most all of the boys rejoic at the news, saying that it will hunt out some of those skinks in Pa."⁸

ON JUNE 26 the Second Division reached the Potomac River. Shortly after noon the First Minnesota climbed the heights on the Virginia side, from which spot Wright observed "Troops and trains . . . massed down by the river, crossing and climbing the hills on the other shore." As the afternoon wore on, the aggregation of troops by the river diminished, and finally it was the turn of the Second Division. Just before dark the men "took arms [and] passed down the hill."

Wright set down a graphic description of the scene: "As it grew dark the pontoon men lighted torches, similar to those used at the [steam] boat landings on the Mississippi . . . at the ends of the bridges. The sun went down behind banks of clouds and it was scarcely dark before a thunderstorm broke over us and we were drenched with . . . ice-cold water . . . peals of thunder shook the hills. . . . [In flashes of lightning] the marching column could be seen, with heads bowed to the wind, moving slowly

⁵ Wright, "Company F," 548.

⁶ Wright, "Company F," 552, 558.

⁷ Wright, "Company F," 545.

⁸ Goddard to his mother, June 20, 1863, Smith Papers. Spelling, punctuation, and capitalization of the original manuscripts have been reproduced throughout. Occasionally letters and words have been supplied within brackets, or paragraphs created for the sake of readability.

*A Union soldier
hangs out his washing
while on the march*



over the heaving pontoons across the storm-swept river.”⁹

The troops were pleased to be in Maryland. Wright remembered: “As we got farther away from the banks of the Potomac . . . there was a different expression of feeling towards us. . . . Flags, handkerchiefs, aprons and sun-bonnets were waved from windows, door-steps, and front-yard fences. . . . a little later, when we made a short halt, women and children came with baskets of buttered bread and *real* doughnuts, pails of water and jugs of buttermilk.”¹⁰

⁹Wright, “Company F,” 552.

¹⁰Wright, “Company F,” 561.

¹¹Marvin Diary, June 30, 1863, in Marvin Papers, Minnesota Historical Society. All quotations are from his unbound “Memorandum and diary notes.” After the war Marvin returned to Winona, where he died in 1903.

Sergeant Matthew Marvin, a twenty-two-year-old leather store clerk from Winona, was also glad to be in Maryland. He wrote in his diary: “Their is some fun in Soldiering in a country like this whare the citizens are at least half humane The country is thickly settled is well wattered & plenty of timber[.]”¹¹

On June 30 the Second Division was again given a day of rest, a welcome relief after the two weeks of marching, during which it had covered more than 150 miles. Sergeant Marvin noted on that date: “We was Mustered to day for May & June for Pay . . . Finished the Pay Rolls & mad[e] Monthly report. For a writeing desk we used Knapsacks & for chairs we sit on the ground & leaned back against the fence & Laved two rails on the fence to keep off the Rain.”

The First, dirty, ragged, and footsore, was on the northward march again about eight o'clock on the morning of July 1. The regiment passed through Taneytown, near the Maryland-Pennsylvania border, and late in the afternoon the men became aware that the long-awaited battle was in progress ahead. They could see smoke and hear the boom of artillery. Marvin recorded: "About 4 o'clock we began to see teams & teamsters Soldiers & Straglers mostly of the eleventh Corps they set all sorts of rumors afloat in the column of Batteries taken & lost[,] of whole Brigades lost & captured & that they had seen over sixty dead Cavalrymen all their rumors of hard fought battles went into one ear & out at the other the 2d Corps has Soldiered to[o] long to believe all they herd from the half moon."¹²

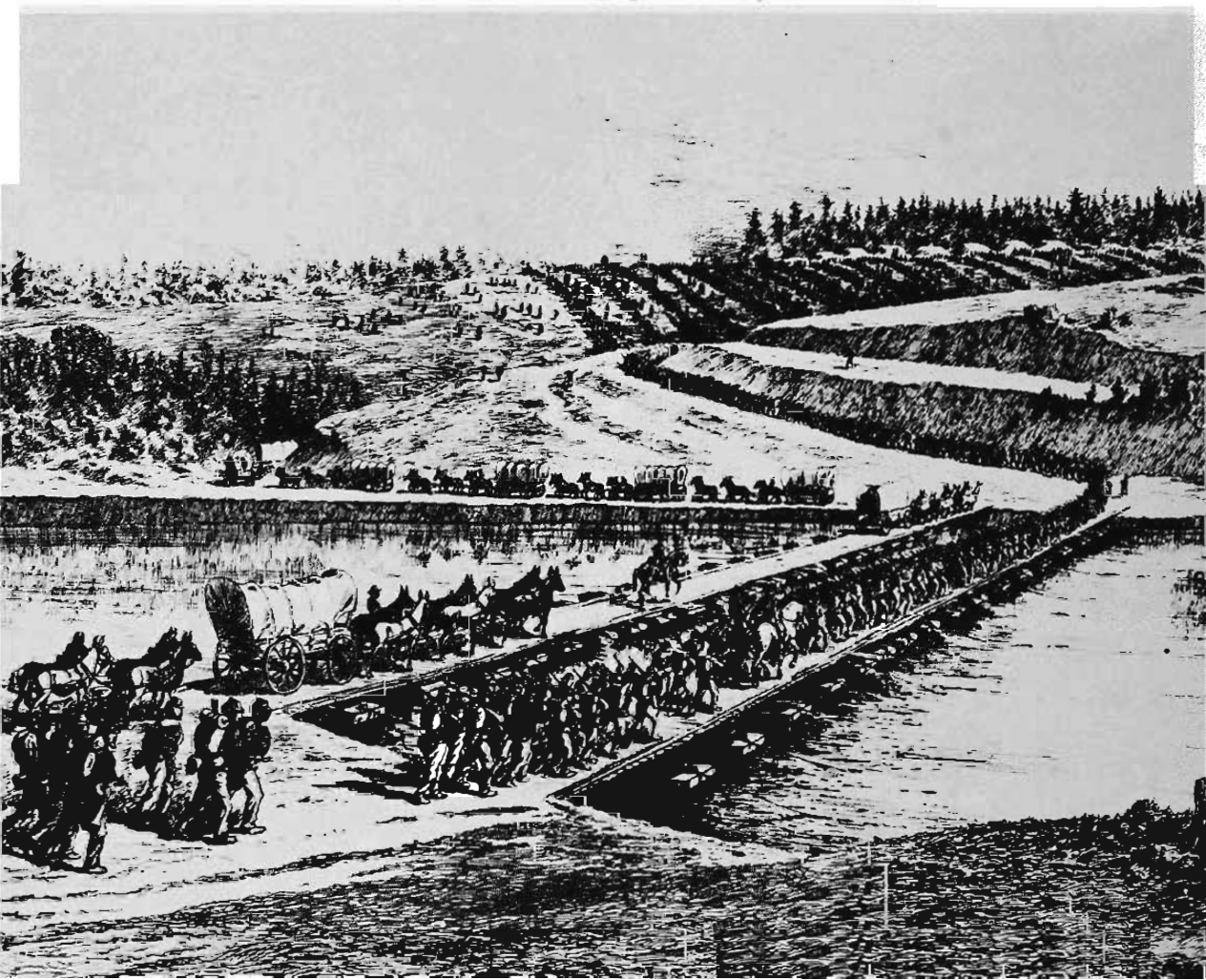
Sometime late in the day the regiment crossed the border into southern Pennsyl-

vania. Marvin's entry for July 1 continued: "At dark we formed our line of battle about 4 miles south of Gettysburg. Three times we got permission to have fires & twice they were put out four times we made coffee & three times we threw it away packed up & fell in at last the order came to build breastworks that we should stay all night we were not allowed to burn a rail & there was No wood so we pulled splinters & Bark off the rails."

ALTHOUGH the men of the First Minnesota do not seem to have credited the reports, Union forces had suffered a sharp defeat on July 1, when Confederate troops, moving down from the northeast and north-

¹² The half moon or crescent was the insignia of General Oliver O. Howard's Eleventh Corps, which was held in low esteem because of its conduct at Chancellorsville. See Lochren, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:31, 34.

THE army making a crossing by means of pontoon bridges



west, had forced them out of the town of Gettysburg. During the night, however, division after division of Northern troops came marching up toward Gettysburg from the south, and by the next afternoon General Meade was strongly entrenched on Cemetery Ridge. Early on July 2 the First Minnesota, along with the rest of the Second Corps, moved onto the ridge in the center of the Union line facing west toward Lee's divisions deployed on Seminary Ridge, a little more than three-quarters of a mile away. The First was placed in reserve just behind the line.

"We stacked arms with Orders to remain near the stacks . . . their was a smart skirmish in the morning the pickets kept up a brisk fireing untile about noon," noted Marvin, adding laconically, "their was a great deal of artillery fireing which a good shair hug[g]ed us rather close."

Private Charles Muller, an Alsatian immigrant from St. Paul, remembered later: "we could hear some canone firing in our front and some Chells went over our heads, but very soon some of tham Bosted [busted] in our front and som of our man were badly wounded. it is quit a pecurial filling [feeling] for a man to stand there on Levell Ground for 3 or 4 hours and be shod at all that time and not being able to defend yourself."¹³

In the afternoon the First Minnesota was called up to the line to support an artillery battery. The men now found themselves on slightly higher ground. Sergeant Alfred P. Carpenter, who had enlisted at the little

village of St. Charles in Winona County, wrote to his family: "we had a full view of the field. . . . From our front the ground sloped some sixty rods to a ravine wooded with small trees and brush; beyond was a plain three fourths of a mile in width and about two miles long."¹⁴

From this vantage point the men had an excellent view of the fruitless attempts of General Daniel E. Sickles' exposed Third Corps to halt the advancing Confederate line.

Private Muller recalled: "In our front about a mile from us we could see som troops fithing [fighting] and very soon we see that our troops give away and were re-tring in our Direction but not in a disorderly condition but wiel [while] they we[re] retring they kupt up a staty [steady] fire and not a man cum faster than a walk."¹⁵

Later, however, a fresh division of enemy troops attacked, and the Third Corps retreated in disorder, running to the rear with their wounded men and flags past and through the lines of the Minnesota regiment.

Behind the retreating troops, wrote Carpenter, "The Rebs came in two splendid lines, firing as they advanced, capturing one of our batteries, which they turned against us, and gained the cover of the ravine. The plain was strewed with dead and dying men. The Rebs had advanced their batteries and were hurling death and destruction into the ranks of our retreating men. They were nearing the hill, which if gained, the day was lost to us."

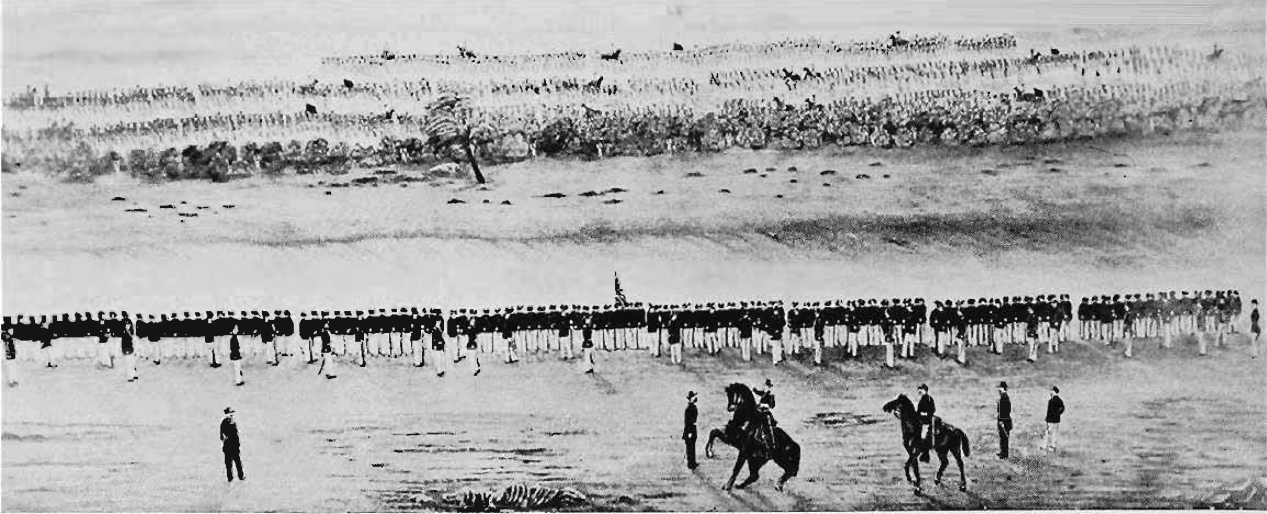
¹³ Muller, "History written by Charles Muller of Company A First Minnesota Regiment," 7, in the Minnesota Historical Society. Muller's reminiscences of the battle were jotted down some time after 1897. Following the war he worked as a stonecutter in St. Paul, where he died in 1925.

¹⁴ Carpenter, Letter about the Battle of Gettysburg, July 30, 1863 (typewritten copy) in the Minnesota Historical Society. The original was (1936) in the family of A. B. Carpenter, Dover, Minnesota. Carpenter was later assigned to Florida and died there of yellow fever in September, 1864.

¹⁵ Muller, "History," 8.

¹⁶ Lochren, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:35.

AT THIS POINT recollections of the battle become vague, contradictory, and confusing. The traditional account of the First's role is given by William Lochren, a lieutenant in the regiment.¹⁶ He says that the 262 men of the First Minnesota constituted the only organized force near enough to stop the Confederate advance. Additional reserves were coming on the run, but General Hancock believed it imperative that the enemy be held for five minutes or so



GENERAL Hancock ordering the famous charge of the First Minnesota,
as pictured by a veteran of the regiment

until the fresh troops arrived. "Hancock spurred to where we stood, calling out, as he reached us, 'What regiment is this?' 'First Minnesota,' replied Colvill. 'Charge those lines!' commanded Hancock."

Lochren maintains that every man in the regiment knew the charge would be suicidal, but they understood the necessity for the sacrifice and responded to Colvill's orders immediately. Down the slope they swept toward the center of the enemy's line. "No hesitation, no stopping to fire, though the men fell fast at every stride before the concentrated fire of the whole Confederate force. . . . Silently, without orders, and, almost from the start, double-quick had changed to utmost speed; for in utmost speed lay the only hope that any of us would pass through that storm of lead and strike the enemy. 'Charge!' shouted Colvill, as we neared their first line; and with leveled bayonets, at full speed, we rushed upon it; fortunately, as it was slightly disordered in crossing a dry brook at the foot of a slope. The men were never made who will stand against leveled bayonets coming with such momentum and evident desperation. The first line broke in our front as we reached it, and rushed back through the second line, stopping the whole advance. We then poured in our first fire, and availing ourselves of such shelter as the low banks of the dry brook afforded, held the entire force at bay for a consider-

able time, and until our reserves appeared on the ridge we had left."

Lochren suggests that the ferocity of the charge had paralyzed the enemy; otherwise their greater numbers would easily have been overwhelming. "Although they poured upon us a terrible and continuous fire from the front and enveloping flanks, they kept at respectful distance from our bayonets until, before the added fire of our fresh reserves, they began to retire, and we were ordered back. . . . The regiment had stopped the enemy, and held back its mighty force and saved the position."¹⁷

Matthew Marvin, who was wounded early in the charge, described the action with his usual conciseness: "at 6 o'clock the battle had went hard with both sides & I think that if either had the worse of it was ours. Our divis[i]o[n] was called in under a sharp artillery fire after deploying we layed down whare the rebs shelled us rite smart. Their collums wer advancing splendidly they [kept] a good line with

¹⁷ Lochren says that 262 men made the charge. Other accounts give different figures. Mr. Imholte estimates that 335 men were involved. (*The First Volunteers*, 116.) The traditional figure for the number of casualties is 215 killed and wounded, or eighty-two per cent, which some historians have claimed as a record for the Union army in the entire war. See for example Bruce Catton, *The Army of the Potomac: Glory Road*, 300 (New York, 1952). Mr. Imholte (p. 121) believes that casualties ranged between 160 and 173, with from 38 to 51 killed and 122 wounded.

not any perceptible confusion at last the time came & we went in on the charge

the two armies wer not over 500 Yds apart we had not fired a musket & the rebs were firing rappedly I drop[p]ed to the ground with a wound some whar I picked my self up as quick as possible when I saw blood on my shoe the heel of which was tore out I thought it a slight one & run to ketch up thinking that no rebel line could stand a charg[e] of my Regt & if the Bayonet must be used I wanted a chance in as it was free to all I had just ketched up when I fell a second time to[o] Faint to get up." After resting a while, Marvin managed to crawl to the rear and was helped to the hospital area.

Private Muller was also wounded in the charge, but not so early in the action. In later life he recalled that his company had advanced only about thirty yards when the enemy opened fire. Colvill, according to Muller, ordered a double-quick march and the men went forward on the run. A brigade on their left broke and fled to the rear, but the Minnesotans ran forward as fast as they could in order to reach the Confederates before they had time to reload their rifles. Muller's account continues: "We run up on to them to within 4 yards w[h]en we begin to fire our first shod and then we went at them with our Bayonets and thos[e] in our front began to Run, but as thire [their] Line was mush longer than ours theyr wings dit advance and cam to our rear." Then, he added, someone commanded the men of the First to retreat.

"I remember that after I fired the first shot," Muller went on, "I stood bihind a Brush and reloaded my Gun and as I was redy to fire I just stapt [stepped] to the right of the Brush when a [Confederate] coller [color] sargent cam up on the other sid of the Brush and calld for the other[s] to folow him and just as [he] dit so and move his flag I held my gun up to him and fired wen the pure [poor] man fell

down then I begin to see for my friends but the most of them have gone or wer shot down then I started to run out of it to[o] but wen I got out on the fi[e]ld the enemis flanks had so mush advanced that the[y] wer only about 50 yards apart and I had to go trouht [through] ther[e] and just as [I] went trouht [through] that point a man from my left dit rais[e] his gun and point at me and fired and hit me in my right t[h]igh but as it hap[p]en did not Brok my boon [bone] so I Kupt on running up to the open fi[e]ld in a ziksak way." When Muller regained his own line, the captain detailed a man to take him to the hospital area, which "was about a mil in the rear of our Line in a nice aple Garten and was a nice spring."¹⁸

Sergeant Carpenter was wounded twice at Gettysburg, although he did not mention the fact in the letter he wrote to his Winona County family on July 30. This is his account of the charge: "Then came the order for the 2nd Division of the 2nd Corps to advance. The hill must be held at all hazards. We advanced down the slope till we neared the ravine, and 'Charge' rung along the line, and with a rush and a yell we went. Bullets whistled past us; shells screached over us; canister and grape fell about us; comrade after comrade dropped from the ranks; but on the line went. . . . We were nearing the Rebel line, and in a moment more we would have been at it hand to hand. Two regiments on our right faltered and subjected us to a flank fire, and we were ordered back, leaving our dead within a few rods of the Rebel line. Then forward we went again and the Rebs were routed, and the bloody field was in our possession; but at what a cost! The ground was strewed with dead and dying, whose groans and prayers and cries for help and water rent the air. The sun had gone down and in the darkness we hurried, stumbled over the field in search of our fallen companions, and when the living were cared for, laid ourselves down on the ground to gain a little rest."

¹⁸ Muller, "History," 11-13.

THE FATE of the regiment was a matter of severe concern to the men of Company F, detached for special service just before the Confederates rushed Cemetery Ridge. The company had been ordered to skirmish for a body of sharpshooters which had taken cover in the bushes and fences across the hollow. As the Confederate attack increased, the position of Company F became untenable and it was ordered to retire to the top of the ridge. Wright, the historian of the company, recalled: "Capt. [John] Ball was very anxious to take the company and go to find the regiment . . . and asked permission to leave the line for that purpose. This was denied, with a promise that he could go in the morning. . . . all were weary and hungry—for very little had been eaten since early morning and it was about 10 o'clock. Men had already made little fires and were making coffee . . . [Our supper consisted of] coffee, brown sugar, crackers and fat, salt pork, with every man his own cook. . . . Then we laid down in line, with our rifles beside us. . . . Wounded men were coming in all the time and men were going out frequently to search for others.

"About this time Sergt. Hamline [*Philip Hamlin, who had been sent to find the regiment and ask for orders*] returned and told Capt. Ball that he had found only a few men of the regiment and it was believed the rest were all killed or captured. This was indeed depressing news, and at first almost stunned us, though we were expecting bad news.

"It was a beautiful summer night, the moon was shining serenely, obscured occasionally by fleecy clouds that drifted across the sky. . . . Lying on the ground, with my head on my knapsack, I got two or three hours of sleep, when firing . . . awoke me. It was just coming daylight. A little in the rear of where the boys lay on the ground, Capt. Ball was walking back and forth. I went to him and he said that he had been there for some time; as he had been unable to sleep for thinking. Said that

he had heard twice from the regiment during the night and the loss was very great."

As soon as it became fairly light, the company was called up and marched along the rear of the line, past weary, sleepy soldiers. Then "we found Capt. [Nathan] S. Messick, of Company G with the colors and what was left of the regiment." Colonel Colvill had been severely wounded and many other field officers were either injured or dead. Messick was in command of the regiment, though only temporarily, for he himself was killed later in the day. Wright noted that the men had not been separated long, "but the greetings were as sincere and earnest as if oceans had divided us and years had elapsed."¹⁹

THE SMALL REMNANT of the regiment returned to its position in the brigade on the crest of Cemetery Ridge. Though the morning of July 3 was comparatively quiet, there was intermittent rifle and artillery fire; some shells landed uncomfortably close. Sergeant Wright described the position. "We were on the slope of the hill facing the enemy. . . . We gathered rails, stones, sticks, brush &c. which we piled in front of us; loosened the dirt with our bayonets and scooped it onto these with our tin plates and onto this we placed our knapsacks and blankets. Altogether it made a barricade from 18 inches to 2 feet high that would protect against rifle bullets. . . . About this time the discovery was made that we had had no breakfast, that canteens were empty, and that we were hungry. Details were sent with canteens to get water, and when these returned coffee was made. . . . After an examination of our rifles and ammunition, which each man was told to make and refill his box from the extra ones we carried, we laid down behind the little shelters we had made and went to sleep."²⁰

Sergeant John W. Plummer, a young soldier from Hennepin County, wrote to his

¹⁹ Wright, "Company F," 599–602.

²⁰ Wright, "Company F," 604.

brother: "Most of us got some coffee during the forenoon, by going one or two at a time back to the rear, where they were allowed fires and cooking, which of course greatly refreshed us. A man's appetite generally, during a battle, is not very voracious. About half past twelve o'clock, as we had gathered around one of our Lieuts. to hear the yesterday's Baltimore *Clipper* read, bang! comes one of their shells over us, striking about twenty yards from us."²¹

This was the beginning of the unforgettable artillery duel between the two armies. The hundreds of field pieces firing at each other literally shook the ground. Sergeant Carpenter described the barrage in the letter to his family. "All at once the guns opened and from morn till middle of afternoon it raged with terrific violence. Flat upon the ground we lay, while the vertical rays of the July sun rendered the heat almost intolerable. To rise up was almost certain death, while flat upon the ground we were tolerable well protected.

"The Rebels could not injure us much except by bursting shells in the air in front of us, and as their object was to silence our batteries they did us little damage, though shot and shell flew over us in such rapid succession that it was impossible to count them, and very near to our bodies at times, one shell actually tearing the knapsack from a man's back as he lay face downward. . . . The noise it produced, the whistling of solid shot; the screeching of shells; the bursting of spherical case; the explosion of cussions; the roar of the pieces is indescribable. . . . Now a wounded man attempts to go back to a hospital and perhaps is cut down before he can gain the rear of the ridge fifteen rods behind us. A case of sunstroke and his comrades start to carry him off; perhaps one of their number is looped off; perhaps all pass uninjured."

Wright's recollection of the barrage was

²¹ Plummer's letter was printed in the *State Atlas* (Minneapolis), August 26, 1863.

²² Wright, "Company F," 608.

even more vivid. "The enemy's line of artillery was soon marked by banks of white vapor, from beneath which tongues of fire were incessantly darting; and the position of the Union line . . . was wreathed in flame and smoke, with the latter drifting over us in whirling clouds. . . . There was an incessant, discordant flight of shells, seemingly in and from all directions; howling, shrieking, striking, exploding, tearing, smashing and destroying. . . . The ground was torn up, fences and trees knocked to splinters, rocks and small stones were flying in the air, ammunition boxes and caissons were exploded . . . guns were dismounted and men and horses were torn in pieces. . . . We had been badly scared many times before this but never quite so badly as then."²²

WHEN the fire of the Union guns finally slackened, Carpenter wrote that the men were afraid the guns had been silenced by the Confederate fire. "We sprang to our feet and could then see what was up. On the opposite slope a long line of Rebel infantry was advancing, while a short distance behind them was a second line as a support." The great advance of fifteen thousand Confederate troops known as "Pickett's Charge" had begun.

Carpenter's account continues: "Almost instantly our whole line bristled with fresh artillery which opened upon the enemy making terrible havoc in their ranks. Wide gaps were opened but were immediately closed and [the] line came on in splendid order, down the slope, across the plain, over the ravine and are now half way up the hill towards us. We had watched them all this while with the utmost impatience, scarcely able to restrain our fire, though knowing that at such a distance it would be comparatively harmless. They are now within musket range and our infantry open; men stagger from their ranks by scores, hundreds, thousands, but on they come like an inrolling wave of the sea."

James Wright recalled that the Union in-

fantry fire was directed at the feet of the Confederate soldiers, "which was about all we could see of them at the time, as all above their knees was covered with the smoke from their own guns." The head of the Rebel charge broke through a stone wall. The First Minnesota with the rest of the brigade was thrown against the flank of the attacking Southern troops. In Wright's words: "It was a grand rush to get there in the quickest time, without much regard to the manner of it—and we knew very well what we were there for—and proceeded to business without ceremony. Closing in on them with a rush and a cheer; there was shooting stabbing and clubbing, for there was no time to reload, and then the bloody work was over. . . . we rushed for the low wall where the break had been made, and very quickly all who had passed it were killed, captured or had fled."²³

Carpenter wrote that desperate fighting continued for about two hours. "Men fell about us unheeded, unnoticed. . . . Our muskets became so heated we could no longer handle them. We dropped them and picked up those of the wounded. Our cartridges gave out. We rifled the boxes of the dead." The din was so great, said Carpenter, that "many of the men became deaf, and did not recover their hearing for a day or two."

Private Muller spent July 3 in a hospital established near a low stone fence which ran along the Baltimore Turnpike. Across the road was a clover field. He recalled that "in the afternoon som 20 or 30 ambulances cum up . . . wit orders to clear our hospital out as fast as posible becaus the Eneme is consentrating its artilery to fire in that direction. I shuld think the ambulances dit tak about 35 or 40 man in the first load and the[y] just started when the[y] becan to troe shell and ball in our direction and in a bout ½ an hour that clover fild on the other sid of Baltimor Turnpike dit look as if it had bin plouhd."²⁴

Later Muller learned about the outcome of the day's fighting from some of his comrades. "That same Evening som of our wounded cam in and tholt [told] us how the day went, and said Boys today we paid the Rebles back for wat they have don to us yesterday."²⁵

Sergeant Hamlin of Company F had been killed in the day's fighting. After the wounded had been taken to the surgeon, the rest of the company made fires in the gathering darkness and prepared something to eat. Wright recalled that "as we drank our coffee we decided to bury Hamline that night. Search was made for a spade and after some time a shovel was found. With this a shallow trench was dug beside a walnut tree, near which he had been killed, struck by four bullets. His blanket and tent-cloth were spread in it, he was then laid upon them and covered with the remaining portions. Then those present knelt in silence about him, with uncovered bowed heads. . . . Then we covered him over with the dirt and stones we had thrown out of the trench and placed at his head a board, on which his name, company and regiment, had been marked."²⁶

THAT NIGHT the men of the First Minnesota slept again on the ground, in the line, with their rifles beside them. July 4 was gray, hot, and oppressive. It was Independence Day, but as Alfred Carpenter pointed out, it was celebrated "in a manner different from ever before. We did not cram the good things of life for we were out of rations. A piece of bread which a Rebel prisoner gave me was very acceptable."

James Wright recalled that burying the dead was the only duty performed by the regiment that day. About noon a light drizzle began which increased during the

²³ Wright, "Company F," 611.

²⁴ Muller, "History," [15].

²⁵ Muller, "History," [16].

²⁶ Wright, "Company F," 616.



afternoon. Some men in Company F were so tired that they slept for hours unsheltered in the falling rain. Toward night the men found some muddy water to make coffee and ate the bits of hardtack remaining in their haversacks.²⁷

Private Marvin, in the hospital area which had been established about two miles in the rear, noted: "this is a gloomy 4th for us. Bandages played out & one of the Dr. went out to the Farmers & asked for Old sheets shirts & pillow slips they told him they had plenty to sell but none to give away whereupon he went to the beds & pulled off[f] the sheets & slips & told them to shell out or he would take the best he could find."

On July 5 Marvin wrote: "To day their has been all most an endlis train of Ambulances al[1] bringing in the rehell wounded. Ours are all off the Field. We are Laying

²⁷ Wright, "Company F," 630, 632.

²⁸ Wright, "Company F," 638.

²⁹ Wright, "Company F," 638. In February, 1864, the First Minnesota was ordered back to its own state. After many ovations along the route, it reached Fort Snelling, where it was quartered until April. Most of the men were then mustered out, their three-year term of service having expired. Many, however, re-enlisted at once in the First Battalion Minnesota Infantry Volunteers and served through the rest of the war, being present when Lee surrendered at Appomattox.

THE DRAWINGS on pages 247, 249, 250, and 257 are from a collection by Edwin Forbes, published under the title *Life Studies of the Great Army* (New York, 1876). The painting on page 252 is by Josias King. These and the illustrations on pages 245 and 246 are a part of the picture collection of the Minnesota Historical Society.

so thick that there is barely room to get around with water or grub. All though the country is thickly settled their has not as yet been a citizen here. They are not so liberal here in southeran Penn as in Md. They charge here \$2.00 per Bushell for corn \$1 per Loaf for Bread 20 cts per Qt of Milk."

The next day he noted: "We got some of our drum Corps to move us back on the hill under the Fly of a tent out of the horrible Stanch that arises from the little puddles of blood & from the wounds a number of the boys have got their cloths full of magots." Another six days passed before Marvin was transferred from the battlefield to a hospital in Baltimore.

On the afternoon of July 4 Lee had begun the withdrawal of his army from Northern territory. Next day the Army of the Potomac started in pursuit. Sergeant Wright recalled that his company had no rations left that day, and in the morning a few men were sent out to forage for food. About noon they returned with some loaves of bread, biscuit, and part of a cheese.²⁸

Orders came to prepare to march. The supply wagons arrived about two o'clock and the men drew rations of coffee, sugar, hardtack, and salt pork. Carpenter noted that there was plenty for all, because "we drew for three hundred and had only one hundred to eat them." It was raining at three o'clock when all that was left of the First Minnesota marched off, over slippery, muddy roads, to pursue the Confederate army for two more bitter years.²⁹



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