



THE LINES AT PETERSBURG AND RICHMOND.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE SIEGE OF PETERSBURG.

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THE fatal misapprehension and delay of the 15th of June forfeited the golden opportunity when Petersburg, defended only by a mere handful, would have fallen at a touch. During the next three days it had been demonstrated, at a cost of 10,000 men, that its improvised defenses had become so strong, and were so strongly held, as to preclude all hope of carrying them by assault. This siege could be conducted only by gaining the avenues through which the defending army received its supplies. Richmond itself was even more impregnable to direct assault than Petersburg, for the elaborate system of works by which it was encircled had been the leisurely work of two years. The James River, coming in from the west, makes a sharp bend, almost a right angle, to the south. Here, on the north bank, at the head of navigation, stands Richmond. The river runs straight northward for ten miles, then turns eastward, and, after a tortuous course, alternating to every point of the compass, receives the Appomattox at City Point. The Appomattox, coming also from the west, bends northward. At this bend, upon the southern bank, stands Petersburg. The Appomattox approaches within three miles of the James, at the point where it makes its eastward turn; then bends to the east, running parallel with the James, which at length turns southwestward to meet it. The peninsula inclosed by these rivers is styled Bermuda Hundred; it is of irregular shape, from six

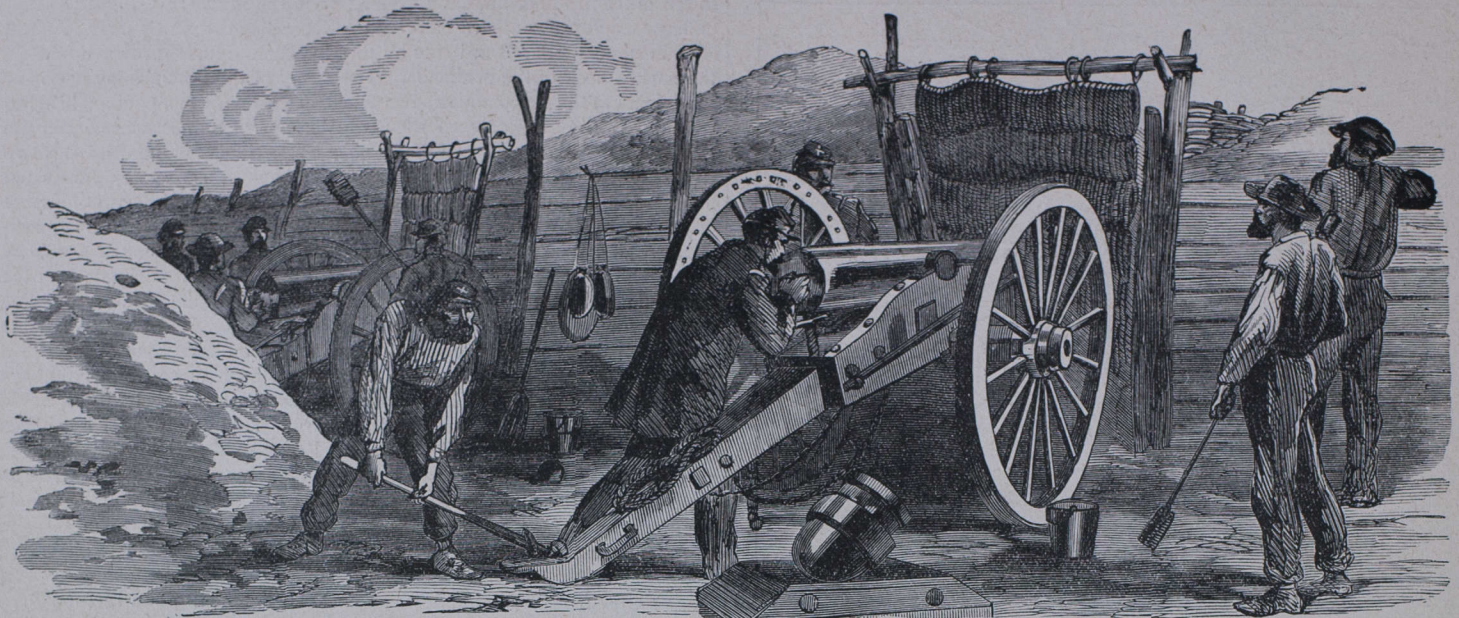
to ten miles in either direction. Here, upon the northern bank of the Appomattox and the southern bank of the James, lay the Army of the James, shut in upon the landward side by the Confederate lines thrown up across the narrow neck of the peninsula. The Army of the Potomac lay upon the south bank of the Appomattox, over which had been thrown pontoon bridges, which, with the gun-boats, afforded ready means of connection between the two armies. Richmond and Petersburg were thus separated by the two rivers; but bridges at the two cities, and pontoons across the James ten miles below Richmond, enabled an army to pass without interruption from one to the other. The cities are connected by a railroad and highway running parallel with the James and Appomattox at the distance of a mile or two. The rivers, except for the space of three miles across the neck of the peninsula at Bermuda Hundred, effectually covered the Confederate line from any assault from either of the Federal armies. Had the Confederate works across the isthmus been taken, a way would have been opened for a direct assault upon the line of the railway. This, if successful, would have severed the connections of Richmond with the south as effectually as would have been done by the capture of Petersburg. This might easily have been done on the 16th, for during that day Beauregard had abandoned these works, and for hours they were occupied only by a few sentries. An attempt was indeed made to occupy these lines on that day; they were held for hours by a mere picket-guard, and the failure to retain them forms a conspicuous part of the first ill-judged operations around Petersburg.¹ This opportunity lost was never again presented. Thereafter no attempt was made to disturb the communications between Petersburg and Richmond.

The defenses of Richmond had long been complete. The exterior line, not in itself very strong except at one or two points, covered the city on the east at a distance varying from four to ten miles, terminating on the south at Chapin's Bluff, on the north bank of the James, opposite to which, on the south bank, is Fort Darling, which effectually bars the passage of the river. From this fort a line of works was extended westward across the railroad. This exterior line, saving at its southern extremity, was never occupied in force. Kilpatrick and Sheridan, in their raids, rode through it, back and forth, but were brought up before the inner line. This line enveloped the city, at a distance of about two miles, from the northeast to the southwest, both extremities resting upon the James, which completed the circuit. The works, extending fully ten miles, were never assailed. They were never even seen by any part of the Union army, save the cavalry, until they were finally abandoned. During the long siege, really of Richmond, though apparently of Petersburg, it is doubtful whether any Federal soldier, save as a prisoner, ever caught sight of the spires of the Confederate capital, or whether the noise of the great battles which were waged for its defense were ever heard in its streets.

Richmond, as fortified, was clearly invulnerable to assault, and could be held so long as the great army which defended it could be fed. But, as has been seen, the capture of Petersburg would involve the loss of the avenues of supply for that army, which must then, of necessity, abandon Richmond. But, as matters stood during the summer and autumn of 1864, the abandonment of Richmond involved the probability of the speedy disbandment of the Army of Northern Virginia. Not only would the abandonment of Richmond be looked upon as the virtual surrender of the cause, but there was then no point in Virginia or the Carolinas at which sufficient supplies could be concentrated. Richmond was the focus upon which converged all the lines of railway from the producing regions, which were soon practically reduced to portions of the states of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. What with the ravages of both armies, the conscription of every able-bodied man, thus reducing the area planted, and finally the general failure of crops, Virginia was practically exhausted.² Supplies from these distant and widely spread regions, and from abroad through the port of Wilmington, could reach the army only over the Weldon, Southside, and Danville railways. These, then, were the vital and assailable points of attack; and to gain these, not the intrenchments which guarded the two cities, or rather fortified camps, was the aim of Grant. To hold these, not to waste his strength in

¹ "On the 16th the enemy, to re-enforce Petersburg, withdrew from a part of his intrenchments in front of Bermuda Hundred [that they withdrew entirely from these intrenchments is shown by Fletcher, vol. iii., 260; referred to ante, p. 640], expecting, no doubt, to get troops from the north of the James to take the place of those withdrawn before we could discover it. General Butler, taking advantage of this, at once moved a force on the railroad between Petersburg and Richmond. As soon as I was apprised of the advantage thus gained, to retain it I at once ordered two divisions of the Sixth Corps, General Wright commanding, to report to General Butler at Bermuda Hundred, of which General Butler was notified, and the importance of holding a position in advance of his present line urged upon him. About two o'clock in the afternoon General Butler was forced back to the line the enemy was forced from in the morning. General Wright, with his two divisions, joined General Butler on the morning of the 17th, the latter still holding with a strong picket line the enemy's works. But, instead of putting these divisions into the enemy's works to hold them, he permitted them to halt and rest some distance in the rear of his own line. Between four and five o'clock in the afternoon the enemy attacked and drove in his pickets, and recaptured his old line."—Grant's Report.

² See Pollard, *Lost Cause*, 648.—In October, before Sherman's march had cut off the supplies from Georgia, the chief of the Bureau of Subsistence reported to President Davis: "The commissariat is in an alarming condition. Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi are the only states where we have an accumulation, and from these all the armies of the Confederacy are now subsisting, to say nothing of the prisoners. The chief commissary of Georgia telegraphs that he can not send forward another pound. Alabama, under the most urgent call, has recently shipped 125,000 pounds, but can not ship more. Mississippi is rendering all the aid possible to the command of General Beauregard in supplying beef: she is without bacon. South Carolina is scarcely able to subsist the troops at Charleston and the prisoners in the interior of the state. During my late visit to North Carolina I visited every section of the state for the purpose of ascertaining the true condition of affairs, and under your orders to send forward every pound of meat possible to the Army of Northern Virginia, and to supply the forts at Wilmington; I was unable to ship one pound to either Virginia or Wilmington. We have on hand in the Confederate States 4,105,048 rations of fresh meat, and 3,426,519 rations of beef and pork, which will subsist 300,000 men twenty-five days. We are now compelled to subsist, independent of the armies of the Confederacy, the prisoners of war, the Navy Department, and the different bureaus of the War Department."—This statement was furnished in the autumn, after the harvest had been gathered. Before that time the state of things could not have been better in this respect. Thus Pollard says that "at the opening of the campaign Lee had urged that rations for thirty days should be kept in reserve at Richmond and Lynchburg, yet on the 2d of May there were at Richmond rations for only two days, and on the 23d of June rations for only thirteen days."



BATTERY BEFORE PETERSBURG

the almost hopeless task of dislodging the beleaguering force from its position, was the policy of Lee. Only twice during the siege, and in both cases under extraordinary circumstances, was any real attempt made by either army upon the intrenchments of the other, and both attempts resulted in disaster.

The siege of Petersburg really began immediately after the repulse of the assault of the 18th of June. Within two days the Union army had thrown up strong lines parallel to those of the Confederates. On the 21st Grant made his first attempt to seize or destroy the railroads. Hancock's and Wright's corps, the Second and the Sixth, were moved out of their intrenchments. Hancock's wound, received at Gettysburg, had broken out afresh, and Birney was now in command of the Second Corps. The object of the movement was to capture the lines to the Weldon Road, and, while holding that, to push the investment of Petersburg farther to the west. The region to be traversed was covered by forests and swamps filled with a dense undergrowth, and cut up by small creeks and runs which fall mainly southward into the streams emptying into Albemarle Sound. These had all to be crossed by the advancing force, while between them ran several tolerable roads by which the Confederates could strike the advancing columns in the flank. The position was, on a smaller scale, not unlike that of the Wilderness. Birney, having the advance, soon came upon the enemy, posted behind earth-works three miles south of Petersburg, but beyond the line of the regular intrenchments. A slight attempt was made upon these by Barlow's division of the Second Corps; but this was soon recalled, and a position taken up for the night. Next morning Wright, who had marched in the rear of Birney, was pushed forward, with the design of taking up a

position on his left, reaching to the railroad. While this movement, somewhat slowly made, was going on, Birney was ordered to swing his left around, so as to take the Confederate works in the flank. This carried him directly away from Wright, and left a wide gap between the two corps, increased every moment by Wright's movement. Hill, who had drawn to this quarter the bulk of his corps, availed himself of the opportunity thus presented, and flung a strong column into the opening, striking each Union corps upon the flank. The weightiest blow fell upon the Second. Barlow's division, on the left, was doubled upon itself, and fell back in confusion, losing heavily; Mott, the next on the right, was then struck, and retreated with loss; this uncovered Gibbon's right, from which whole regiments were swept away. But the corps was finally reformed upon its original line, where it was assailed. But the fierce Confederate swoop had exhausted its impetus. The assault was repelled; and Hill's columns withdrew as suddenly as they had advanced, carrying with them many hundreds of prisoners and several guns. Meanwhile another Confederate column had struck Wright's corps, and forced back its advanced line. But in the evening the whole line was reformed and intrenched for the night, while the Confederates intrenched themselves upon the railroad. The next morning, the 23d, Wright sent a small reconnoitring force to the railroad, which was reached at a point below the Confederate position. But hardly had they cut the telegraph wires when Anderson, at the head of Longstreet's division, fell upon their flank, drove them away, capturing many prisoners, and assailed the main line, which was withdrawn to the cover of the breastworks.

This attempt, which cost from 3300 to 4000 men in killed, wounded, and prisoners, resulted in no advantage. The line of investment was indeed somewhat extended to the left; but, as the railroad was not reached, the extension was of no use; and after it had been held without molestation for a



GERSHON MOTT.



DAVID B. BIRNEY.



BUILDING WORKS.

few days, most of it was abandoned, and the advanced force was withdrawn to its former intrenchments in front of the Confederate lines.¹

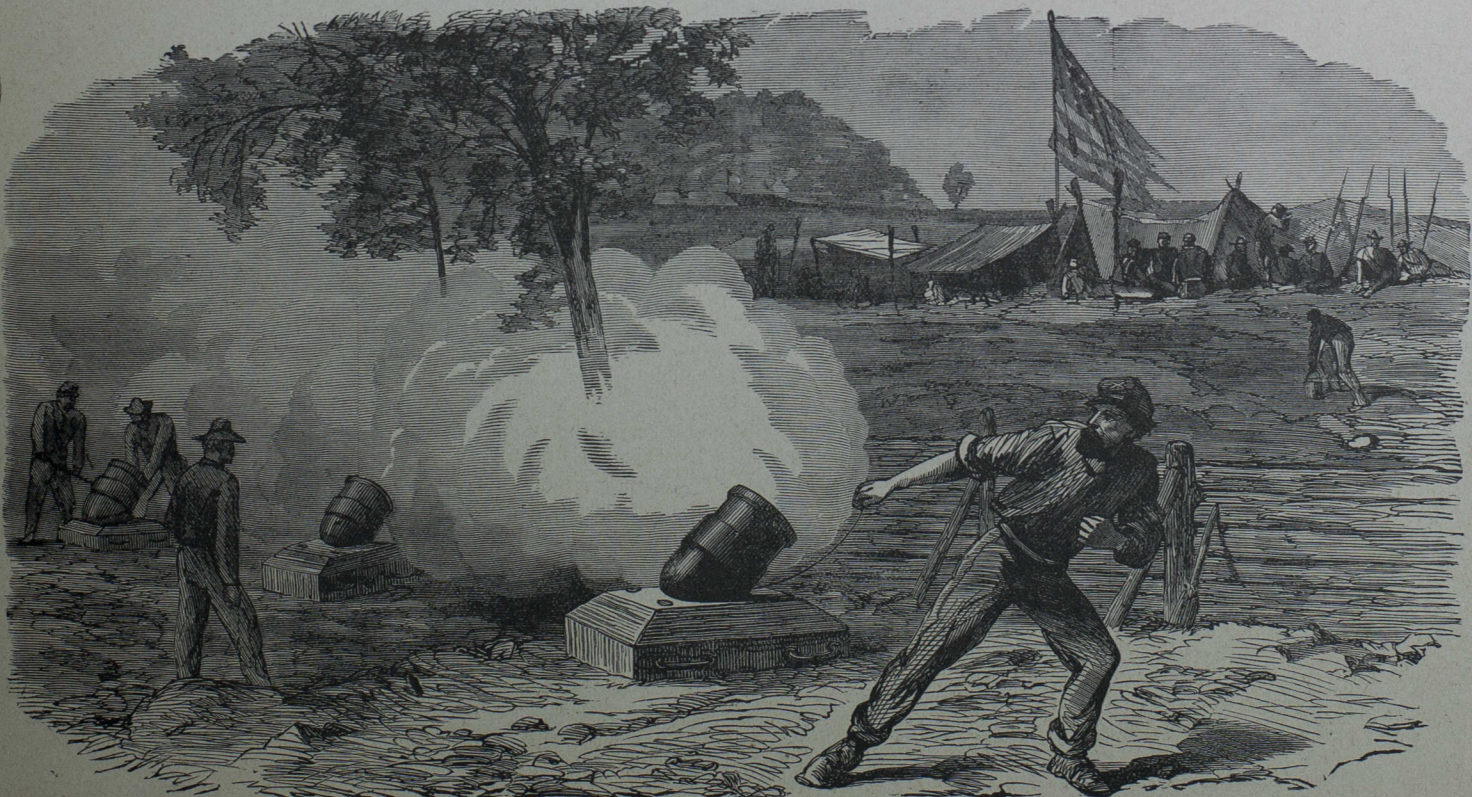
Simultaneously with this infantry movement, a cavalry expedition, consisting of Wilson's and Kautz's divisions, 8000 strong, was sent against the railroads. On the 22d they struck the Weldon Road at Reams's Station, ten miles below Petersburg, seven miles from the point where Birney and Smith were engaged. Having burned the dépôt and water-tank, and destroyed a considerable stretch of the road, they pushed on for the Southside Road, which they struck at a point fifteen miles from Petersburg. Kautz rode forward to Burkesville, the junction of the Southside and Danville roads, 50 miles from Petersburg, where he began to destroy the track. Wilson pushed ten miles down the Southside Road, which he destroyed in his way. Here he was met by Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry, which he defeated after a brisk fight, and thence moved on to rejoin Kautz. Both divisions then pushed down the Danville Road, damaging it for eighteen miles to Roanoke Bridge. This was found defended by a considerable body of militia, hastily gathered

¹ It is singular that this costly attempt upon the Weldon Road is not even alluded to in Grant's otherwise comprehensive Report. For the losses we are compelled to resort mainly to conjecture. Swinton, p. 512, states that the Second Corps lost 2500 prisoners, and the Sixth several hundreds. I do not find the authority upon which the statement is made, and think it an over-estimate. The semi-official statement furnished to Coppeé (*Grant and his Campaigns*, 399) gives the entire loss in the Army of the Potomac from June 20 to July 30 at 5316, of whom 605 were killed, 2494 wounded, and 2217 missing. It does not certainly appear whether this includes the losses in the cavalry expedition of Wilson and Kautz, in which Lee claims to have taken 1000 prisoners; and whether among these are to be included several hundred negroes who had followed this expedition on its return, does not appear. Although in these forty days there was no active battle, there was continued picket-firing between the lines. Burnside, whose corps was most exposed, gives (*Testimony, Battle of Petersburg*, 144) the loss in his corps during this time at 1138 men killed and wounded. The other corps undoubtedly lost many; probably the entire loss in the trenches was about 1500 (for the eighteen days following August 1 it was 868). Assuming that in the foregoing 5315 are included the losses of the cavalry expedition, and that these amounted, exclusive of captured negroes, to 1000, and that the losses in the trenches were 1500, there remain 2836 for this attempt upon the railroad, of whom probably more than 1800 were prisoners, leaving about 400 for the captures from the cavalry. From the best accessible data, I judge the foregoing estimates to be a close approximation to the truth.

from the adjacent parts of Virginia and North Carolina. The whole region was now aswarm, and on the 24th the expedition, having accomplished its purpose, set out on its return. At Stony Creek, on the Weldon Road, they had a sharp but indecisive action with a force of Confederate cavalry. Finding these too strong to be dislodged, by a wide detour to the left they struck for Reams's Station, which was supposed to be in possession of the Union forces. But, instead of this, it was held by a strong force of Confederate cavalry and infantry, sent down from Petersburg after the abandonment of Birney's and Wright's attempt. Wilson was forced to fall back in every direction, losing all his artillery and trains. The two divisions became separated, and only succeeded in making their way back within the Federal lines in straggling parties and most wretched plight, having lost at least 1000 men.¹

Although this expedition terminated so disastrously, it had accomplished much for which it was undertaken. The destruction of the railroads was so thorough, that, urgent as was the need of their repair, it required twenty-three days to accomplish this. Lee had then but thirteen days' rations for his army. To feed them the commissary general had to offer the market price for wheat still standing uncut or shocked in the field. This market price was then twenty dollars a bushel in Confederate money; for specie it could be bought for a dollar. The price rose almost at a bound to forty dollars. That is, Confederate paper, which had for months been received and paid at the rate of twenty dollars for one in specie, fell suddenly to forty, and thence steadily declined to sixty for one. For months, indeed, it would have wholly lost all recognized value had not the government steady-

¹ Lee, in his dispatch, says: "In the various conflicts with the enemy's cavalry in their late expedition against the railroads, besides their killed and wounded left on the field, 1000 prisoners, 13 pieces of artillery, and 30 wagons and ambulances were taken." As before noted, we think that among the prisoners are included some hundreds of negroes who had attached themselves to the expedition.



A MORTAR BATTERY.



RETURN OF KAUTZ'S CAVALRY.



SIGNAL STATION.

ly sold gold at nearly or quite that rate. Bankruptcy of the government had quite as much to do with the sudden collapse of the Confederacy as the defeats which it suffered in the field. For a time, indeed, under a rigid despotism, soldiers can be kept in the ranks without pay. The Confederate government succeeded in doing this for months. Indeed, it is said that "there were thousands of soldiers who had not received a cent of pay in the last two years of the war." When a "loaf of bread was worth three dollars in Richmond, and a soldier's monthly pay would hardly buy a pair of socks,"¹ it mattered little whether this nominal pay was ever received. But to feed, clothe, and equip an army requires money. Any government which has exhausted all its resources, actual and possible, must go down. The bankruptcy of the French monarchy under Louis XVI. was the immediate cause of its overthrow; for without this, the States-General, which inaugurated the Revolution, would never have been convened. This raid of Wilson hurried on the bankruptcy of the Confederacy. But for this it might have had a longer lease of life, with all the innumerable possibilities of the chapter of accidents. Grant, therefore, looking back after a year, was justified in affirming that "the damage suffered by the enemy in this expedition more than compensated for all the losses we sustained."

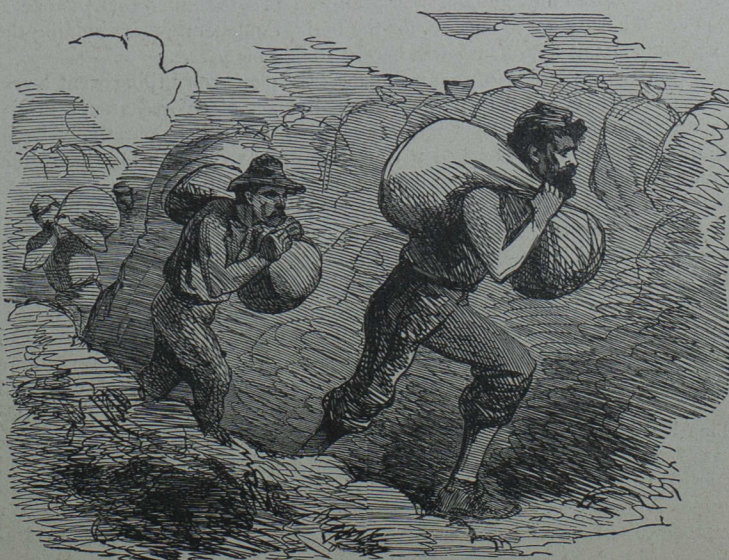
But for the time the attitude of the Army of Northern Virginia was more defiant, and seemingly more threatening than at any former period during the campaign. It was, after all its losses, nearly as strong as when it moved upon the Wilderness; stronger than when it foiled Grant at Spotsylvania, held him in check upon the North Anna, and defeated him upon the Chickahominy. The efficiency of the Federal army, in the mean while, had been greatly impaired. Its numbers, perhaps, had been kept up, but it had lost well-nigh half of its best officers and men; the remainder had suffered fearfully by their arduous labors under a fierce midsummer sun, through a drought of unexampled intensity, with a sky of brass overhead, and a soil of ashes underfoot. Not a few of the recruits, brought in by the enormous bounties then paid, were poor material for soldiers; and even the good material needed time to transform them into efficient soldiers. Even the tried veterans lacked much of their old determination. More than one leader of a storming-party in the fresh assaults upon the outworks of Petersburg was compelled to admit that his men did not charge as they had done a month before. But when, in the Weldon movement, the Second Corps, which had come to be recognized as the best in the army, fell back, division after division, almost routed by an inferior foe, losing twice as many in prisoners as in killed and wounded, it became clear that there must be a pause for reorganization and recuperation. Five weeks passed before another active operation was undertaken, and that also resulted in disaster.

Lee, indeed, was now so confident of the invulnerability of his position, that he ventured to detach a quarter of his army from Petersburg and Richmond to threaten once more the Federal capital. Hunter's eccentric retreat from Lynchburg had left the Valley of the Shenandoah bare of troops. The defenses of Washington had been stripped of almost every man to re-enforce the Army of the Potomac. Lee, reasoning justly from all former experience, was warranted in believing that a demonstration upon Washington would induce the recall of a large part of the force in his front, and not improbably even to the entire abandonment of the siege. Early had been already sent with a part of his corps to check the advance of Hunter upon Lynchburg. Now re-enforced by a part of Longstreet's corps, he was directed to march down the Valley of the Shenandoah to the Potomac, thus separating him by a perilous distance from the main army. This movement failed in its main purpose of causing Grant to detail any considerable part of his force from the lines before Petersburg. The Sixth Corps was sent thence, and to these was added the Nineteenth, under Emory, which had just arrived at Hampton Roads from the unlucky Red River expedition of Banks, and, without even disembarking, sailed up the Potomac to Washington. Grant's army was thus reduced by about the same number of men which Early had taken from that of Lee. Of the career of Early in this expedition, ending months after, in the annihilation of his forces, we shall speak hereafter.

As the month of July drew toward a close, signs of movement began to appear in the Federal army upon the James. Butler had, simultaneously with the attempt on the railroads, crossed a division over to the north bank of that river, which had intrenched itself securely at Deep Bottom, ten miles below Richmond. This position formed a point from which a force might, upon occasion, be directed against Richmond. Grant now planned an operation with a twofold object. The immediate purpose was by means of a cavalry expedition to cut the railroads north of Richmond, and thus make Lee wary of the situation of Early, who, having failed in his demonstration upon Washington, was lying in the Valley of the Shenandoah. The secondary purpose was, by apparently threatening a movement against Richmond, to force Lee to withdraw a considerable force from Petersburg, which was then to be assaulted. On the night of the 26th of July, Hancock's corps, with three divisions of cavalry, crossed the James. On the two following days offensive movements were made in such force as to convince Lee that Richmond was to be assailed. He brought over five of his eight divisions, leaving but three at Petersburg. This force was sufficient to prevent the Union cavalry from moving to the railroad, but its withdrawal across the James seemed to promise success to a sudden attack upon the lines at Petersburg, to be opened by the explosion of a mine which had been excavated under a fort which formed a part of the Confederate works.

This mine had been prepared with the consent rather than the approval of Meade. Burnside's corps had held the line upon the right. At one point his intrenchments approached within a hundred and forty yards of the Confederate works. Just in the rear of the advanced position was a deep hollow, where work could be carried on unseen by the enemy. One of Burnside's regiments was made up of miners from Pennsylvania. Some of the soldiers suggested that a mine should be dug right under this Confederate fort, perched upon the brow overhanging the hollow. The talk passed from grade to grade, until it reached Colonel Pleasants, the commander of the regiment, by whom it was communicated to his division commander, and by him to Burnside, who at once gave permission for the commencement of the work. So little confidence had Meade in its success that only the slightest facilities were afforded for its execution. Nothing better than empty cracker-boxes were furnished to carry out the earth. In spite of all obstacles, Pleasants pushed on the work. It was begun on the 25th of June, and was finished on the 23d of July. It consisted of a main shaft four or five feet in diameter, five hundred and twenty feet long, terminating in lateral branches forty feet in either direction. Four days after, Grant having finally resolved upon assaulting Petersburg, orders were given to charge the mine with 8000 pounds of powder. Burnside asked for 12,000 pounds, but the engineers at headquarters decided that this was too much.

Daybreak of the 30th was the time fixed upon for the attack. The mine was to be exploded at half past three. Burnside was to dash through the



CARRYING POWDER TO THE MINE.

¹ Pollard, *Lost Cause*, 647. For the effect of Wilson's raid upon Confederate finances, see *Ibid.*, 647, 652.



EXPLOSION OF THE MINE.

breach, and seize a crest a few hundred yards in the rear, which was apparently unfortified. This crest, known as Cemetery Hill, commanded Petersburg. Warren, upon Burnside's right, was to mass his whole corps, except just enough to hold his intrenchments, and join in the assault. Ord, who had replaced Gillmore in the command of the Eighteenth Corps of the Army of the James, was to support Burnside on the left. Thus fully 50,000 men were appointed for the attack. Hancock, moreover, who had been secretly withdrawn from the north side of the James, was to hold himself in readiness to support the assaulting column; while Sheridan, with his whole cavalry corps, was to move against the enemy's left. It seemed that the operation could hardly fail of success, for the entire Confederate force holding the intrenchments at Petersburg was barely 15,000 men.

But in the execution of this well-conceived plan every thing went awry. Burnside had proposed to put Ferrero's division of colored troops in the front. They had not as yet been engaged, and were comparatively fresh, while the other divisions had performed arduous duty during the whole campaign, and ever since they had occupied the position before Petersburg had been so close to the enemy that no man could safely raise his head above the parapet. In forty days, without being engaged in any formal action, they had lost more than 1100 men out of 9000. They had acquired the habit of seeking shelter, and it could be hardly expected that they would at once forego the habit, and be efficient in the fierce and sudden charge upon which depended success. The colored division, on the contrary, had been for several weeks trained for just such an enterprise. Meade disapproved of the plan of putting the colored troops in the front. He averred that, should the operation prove unsuccessful, it would be said that these men had been pushed ahead because we did not care for them. Burnside was, however, so urgent that the question was referred to Grant, who agreed with Meade. Then Burnside left it to be decided by lot which of his three white divisions should lead. The chance fell upon Ledlie's, the poorest probably, certainly the worst commanded, of all. The fuse was lighted at the appointed moment. An hour passed, and no explosion followed. Two

brave men, Lieutenant Douty and Sergeant Rees, volunteered to creep into the mine and ascertain the cause. They found that the fuse had parted within fifty feet of the magazine. They relighted it, and had just emerged from the mine when the explosion took place. A solid mass of earth, mingled with timbers, rose two hundred feet into the air, and fell sullenly back, leaving where the fort had stood a crater two hundred feet long, sixty feet wide, and thirty deep. At the instant the guns from all the batteries opened fire. The enemy were taken completely by surprise, and replied but feebly, and this feeble fire was soon almost silenced. Ledlie's men dashed over the lip of the crater, and plunged wildly into its depths. Between them and the commanding crest there was nothing but the rough, steep sides of the crater. A determined rush would have crowned the crest with the loss of hardly a man.

Burnside's original plan of assault, submitted to Meade four days before, was judiciously conceived. The fort occupied a re-entering angle where the Confederate intrenchments receded from the general direction of the lines. This fort being demolished, not only were the defenses pierced, but the works to the right and left were taken in reverse. Believing that his colored division might be relied upon for a vigorous charge, he proposed that it should be massed into two close columns; as soon as the heads of these had passed through the breach caused by the explosion, the two leading regiments of each were to sweep to the right and left, seizing the enemy's lines, while the remainder of the columns should dash straight forward upon Cemetery Hill, to be followed by the other divisions as rapidly as they could be thrown in. The crest gained, the colored division was to push right into the town. He seems to have supposed that his corps was sufficient for the assault, merely suggesting that the other corps should co-operate indirectly, and be in readiness to hold the crest, while he pushed forward toward Petersburg.¹ But the refusal of Meade to permit the colored divi-

¹ The sending the whole of the Ninth Corps to Cemetery Hill would, says Burnside, "involve the necessity of relieving these divisions by other troops before the movement, and of holding columns of other troops in readiness to take our place on the crest in case we gain it and sweep down

son to take the advance materially changed Burnside's plans; and Meade's general order, issued on the evening before the assault, was so worded as apparently to ignore the movement to the right and left, or at least to leave the seizure of the lines to be performed by Warren and Ord.¹ There was one important part of the order of Meade with which Burnside failed to comply. He directed that Burnside should "prepare his parapets and abatis for the passage of the columns." Nothing of the kind was done. Burnside declares that "this part of the order was necessarily inoperative, because of the lack of time and the close proximity of the enemy, the latter of which rendered it impossible to remove the abatis from the front of our line without attracting not only a heavy fire of the enemy, but letting him know exactly what we were doing." Thus it was that the only approach to the breach was by two crooked covered ways, only wide enough to admit the passage of two to four men abreast.²

The explosion of the mine took the enemy completely by surprise. Hardly had the concussion ceased when the head of Ledlie's division began to move for the breach. Climbing the rim, they saw before them the deep crater, its sides of loose sand, from which protruded masses of clay, mingled with beams and timbers, the ruins of the fort. It presented an obstacle over which it was impossible to pass in military order. Into this the men pressed and huddled in inextricable confusion. The enemy abandoned their lines for a space on each side of the chasm. Into these the troops spread themselves, and, although as yet no fire was opened upon them, they sought shelter, and refused to move. Brigade after brigade poured in, until the crater was crowded with a disorganized mass. A single regiment climbed the slope, and advanced a few hundred yards toward the crest, to seize which was the first object of the assault, but, seeing no others following them, fell back into the shelter of the crater and the abandoned Confederate lines. So an hour passed, the confusion growing momentarily greater. Ledlie all this time was safely ensconced in a bomb-proof in the rear of the Union lines, which he hardly left for a moment. In the mean while the enemy, recovering from his first astonishment, began to plant batteries so as to sweep the approaches to the crater, toward and upon each side of which Burnside's divisions were now pressing. Potter, on the right, endeavored to extricate his division from the crowded gulf and gain the crest in its rear. But he found the way blocked up by Ledlie's men lying in the shelter of the works which they had seized, and from which they made no attempt to advance. Potter at length got two or three regiments across, and had formed them into something like order. It was now six o'clock, an hour and a quarter after the explosion. Meade, who had taken his position a mile from the scene of action, imperfectly informed of what was going on, sent orders to Burnside to push his men, white and black, forward at all hazards; to lose no time in making formations, but to rush for the crest. Ferrero's colored division dashed forward gallantly toward the crater, although the approach was swept by a heavy cross-fire right and left. A part of these troops rushed straight for the chasm and plunged into it, filling it so that there was barely standing-room. Some of them pressed through the troops near the crater, partially formed, and charged toward the crest, capturing two or three hundred prisoners—the only semblance of success on this fatal day. But they were met by a counter-charge, and broke and fled in utter confusion, sweeping back in their flight many of the white troops. It was clear that all chance of success was past. Orders had been given to Warren and Ord to support Burnside; these were countermanded, and at a quarter to ten Burnside was directed to abandon the crater and withdraw to his intrenchments. Burnside was chagrined at this order. He still hoped against hope that he could carry the crest. Ord, who had advanced a brigade of his division, declared that this was impossible, and the order to cease all further efforts was reiterated.

But to withdraw now was a work of difficulty and danger. The space over which the troops must retire was now swept by a furious fire of musketry and artillery. The men within the crater were sheltered by the declivity from a direct fire; but the Confederates had planted mortars, from which shells were rained down among the densely packed masses. To remain was as perilous as to retreat, more perilous than it would have been to advance. The troops swarmed out in squads, losing fearfully on the way. The enemy charged fiercely down to the edge of the crater, and were repulsed; a second charge was made; the whole mass broke and fled. It

it. It would, in my opinion, be advisable, if we succeed in gaining the crest, to throw the colored division right into the town. There is a necessity for the co-operation, at least in the way of artillery, by the troops on our right and left. Of the extent of this General Meade will necessarily be the judge. I think the chances of success in a plan of this kind are more than even."—Burnside, however, had good reason to avoid more than a mere suggestion as to the employment of other corps. Nearly a month before, when asked for his opinion as to the practicability of making an assault in front of his lines, he had said: "If the assault be delayed until the completion of the mine, I think we should have a more than even chance of success. If the assault be made now, I think we have a fair chance of success, provided my corps can make the attack, and it is left to me to say when and how the other two corps shall come to my support." Meade replied, somewhat curtly: "The recent operations in your front," that is, the mine, "as you are aware, though sanctioned by me, did not originate in any orders from these headquarters. Should it, however, be determined to employ the army under my command in offensive operations, I shall exercise the prerogative of my position to control and direct the same, receiving gladly, at all times, any suggestions which you may think proper to make. I consider these remarks necessary in consequence of certain suggestions which you have thought proper to attach to your opinion, acceding to which in advance would not, in my judgment, be consistent with my position as commanding general of this army."

¹ "Major General Burnside will spring his mine, and his assaulting columns will immediately move rapidly upon the breach, seize the crest in the rear, and effect a lodgment there. He will be followed by Major General Ord, who will support him on the right, directing his movement to the crest indicated, and by Major General Warren, who will support him on the left." Meade, however, says: "General Burnside submitted for my consideration a plan of attack of which I never disapproved. The only question of difference was in regard to the troops to be employed. I never objected to the handling of his troops; I only objected to the colored troops being placed in the advance. General Burnside afterward seemed to be under the impression that I objected to all of his plans. But as to his tactical formation, and what he was to do with his troops, I made no objection."

² Many officers attribute mainly to this neglect to remove the abatis and parapets the disastrous result of the operation. This forms one of the four grounds upon which the Court of Inquiry censured General Burnside.

was now past noon. For eight hours the men had been crowded, without water, under a fierce July sun, within that narrow slaughter-pen. This disastrous attempt cost 4000 men, of whom 1900 were prisoners, who surrendered rather than run the fierce gauntlet of fire. In Burnside's corps of hardly 15,000 men, the loss was 3828. With the exception of a single brigade of Ord's corps, none of the 50,000 men who had been prepared for this assault, save Burnside's corps, were put into action. Burnside had no authority to call upon Warren or Ord, and Meade delayed until too late to order them into action.

This affair of the mine was made the subject of searching investigation by a Court of Inquiry and by the Congressional Committee. Their conclusions as to the causes of the failure were somewhat different. The court found that this was owing to the injudicious formation of the troops, the movement being made by flank instead of extended front; to the halting of the troops in the crater instead of going forward to the crest when there was no fire of consequence from the enemy; that some parts of the assaulting column were not properly led; and to the want of a competent common head at the scene of assault to direct affairs as occurrences should demand. They mildly censured Burnside for all except the last of these, and sharply censured Ledlie and Ferrero for absolute inefficiency, if not cowardice in, keeping themselves habitually in a bomb-proof instead of being present at the assault. The Congressional Committee attribute the failure primarily to the refusal of Meade, sanctioned by Grant, to permit the colored division to lead the assault, and generally to the fact that "the plans and suggestions of the general who had devoted his attention for so long a time to the subject, who had carried out to a successful completion the project of mining the enemy's works, and who had carefully selected and drilled his troops for the purpose of securing whatever advantages might be attainable from the explosion of the mine, should have been so entirely disregarded by a general who had evinced no faith in the successful prosecution of that work, had aided it by no countenance or open approval, and had assumed the entire direction and control only when it was completed, and the time had come for reaping any advantages that might be derived from it." Grant, in his testimony, attributes the disaster to the utter inefficiency of the division commanders, and especially of the one who was to lead the advance of the attacking columns. Meade's order, he says, was all that was required: "if the troops had been properly commanded, and been led in accordance with this order, we should have captured Petersburg, with all the artillery, and a good portion of its support, without the loss of five hundred men. There was a full half hour when there was no fire against our men, and they could have marched past the enemy's intrenchments just as they could in the open country; but that opportunity was lost in consequence of the division commanders not going with their men, but allowing them to go into the enemy's intrenchments and spread themselves there without going on farther, thus giving the enemy time to collect and organize against them. If they had marched through to the crest of that ridge they would have taken every thing in the rear. I do not think there would have been any opposition at all to our troops had that been done." Although Grant afterward believed that, if Burnside had been allowed to put his colored division in the advance, "it would have been a success," he still thought his own refusal and that of Meade to permit this was at the time right and proper. "We had," he says, "but one division of colored troops in the whole army about Petersburg at that time, and I do not think it would have been proper to put them in front, for nothing but success would have justified it. The cause of the disaster was simply the leaving the passage of orders from one to another down to an inefficient man. I blame his seniors, also, for not seeing that he did his duty, all the way up to myself." He thought this commander the poorest of all; he knew that he had been chosen simply by lot; yet he adds, "I did nothing in regard to it." This great effort, for which such abundant preparations had been made, was conducted without any common head. Although the lieutenant general and the second in command were all the while close at hand, neither gave any practical orders until the crisis was past. Neither even took adequate measures to know what had been done or left undone. They seem to have thought success so certain that they neglected all precaution to secure it. It is inexplicable that, out of the 50,000 men who stood drawn up in battle order for this very purpose, not a third were ordered to advance for the hours during which the operation continued. In Warren's front the fire of the enemy was silenced, and yet he was never permitted to move a man from his lines. "Thus terminated in disaster what promised to be the most successful assault of the campaign."¹ It cost more than 4000 men to the assailants, while the entire loss to the Confederates, including the regiment blown up in the fort, and the prisoners captured by the colored division, were hardly a quarter as many.

The mine enterprise had been undertaken under a conjuncture of favorable circumstances, a recurrence of which could not be looked for. It had failed utterly and disastrously. The failure had demonstrated that the works about Petersburg could not be carried by direct assault upon their strong centre. But the whole line necessary for the defense of the two cities was so extended that it seemed certain that there must be weak points somewhere, and that these points were to be found at the extremities. Grant had thrown up works opposite those of the enemy, in front of Petersburg, so strong that they could be held by a fraction of his army, leaving the bulk of it free to operate upon either flank of the Confederate lines. These lines nominally extended from the north side of Richmond around to the James, thence to and around Petersburg. As finally developed north-



IN THE TRENCHES BEFORE PETERSBURG.



CONFEDERATE WORKS AT HATCHER'S RUN.

ward to Hatcher's Run, their whole extent from the north of Richmond to the south of Petersburg was forty miles. But Grant, in placing his army on the south side of the James, had abandoned all purpose of assailing, or even menacing Richmond from the north or east. The works immediately around the Confederate capital were therefore held only by Ewell, who had been disabled from active service in the field. The garrison of Richmond was really nothing more than a body of militia, nominally numbering about 10,000; but of these there were never during the summer 5000 reported as present for duty. During the whole siege, indeed, the gay people of the Confederate capital—and Richmond was never so gay as during this period—never saw a regiment of the veteran troops who were defending it.

The real line which Lee had to hold began upon the James River, ten miles below Richmond. Here, at Chapin's Bluff, on the north bank, and Fort Darling, opposite on the south bank, strong works had been erected. Thence to Petersburg the distance is fifteen miles. But this space, as has been shown, was protected by the two rivers, and by the works across the narrow neck of Bermuda Hundred. So perfect were the natural defenses of this space of fifteen miles that it was never occupied in force. It could be assailed only by the narrow isthmus. During the whole siege this space was never even menaced. At the time of the mine affair a demonstration here was suggested, but the idea was pronounced impracticable. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia was then posted in two great divisions: the left, under Longstreet, who was slowly recovering from the wound received in the Wilderness, at Chapin's Bluff; the right, with which was Lee, at Petersburg. An attack any where upon the centre, from Petersburg to Fort Darling, being out of the question, Grant was shut up to the alternative of assailing one flank or both of the Confederate lines; that is, to move upon the left from Deep Bottom, where a part of Butler's force had a secure lodgment, up the north bank of the James, and thus threaten Richmond directly, or to operate upon the right flank, assailing, not Petersburg directly, but the railroads whereby the Confederate armies were mainly fed.¹ Grant's theory of operations was to make a strong demonstration upon one flank, and then to follow it up with a movement upon the other, each being made in such force as to be converted into a real attack should circumstances warrant. It was assumed throughout that the enemy could not strengthen one flank without greatly weakening the other. The capture of Richmond, though important, was still a secondary consideration, for the Confederate army occupying Petersburg would still remain to be destroyed before any decisive advantage was gained; whereas, if the railroads were destroyed or seized, the enemy, deprived of sustenance, must become a certain prize. Hence

Grant's main efforts were always directed against the enemy's right, while Lee, equally aware of the nature of the case, massed the bulk of his force in the works around Petersburg, leaving at Chapin's Bluff hardly more than a corps of observation, yet always ready to strengthen it whenever a menace was made in that quarter.

The terrain south of Petersburg presented great natural obstacles for attack, and furnished admirable facilities for an offensive defense. The roads radiate like the sticks of an expanded fan. First running south is the Jerusalem Plank Road. This was now in the possession of the Union force. Next, parallel to it, is the Weldon Railroad; then come several minor roads, and then the Boydton Plank Road running southwest; and, lastly, the Southside Railroad, running almost west. Hatcher's Run, a small stream threading through swamps and thickets, flows eastwardly from near the Southside Railroad, crossing the Boydton Plank Road, when it bends southward, forming a sort of wet ditch to the south side of Petersburg, at a distance of six miles. The Confederate works closely encircled Petersburg until they reached the Boydton Plank Road, which they then followed to Hatcher's Run, crossing it and continuing for a space along its southern bank. They thus effectually covered the Southside Railroad for a space of many miles. To reach this vital artery the assailants must pass westward clear around the Confederate lines, and then turn northwest, involving a march of at least thirty miles by any practicable roads. A column making this march was exposed to a blow upon its flank from any one of the roads leading from Petersburg. The Confederates could sally from their intrenchments, strike any exposed part of the column, and return, in case of check, to their fortified position. The Union lines followed the general course of those of the enemy. But the complete development of both was a work of months. Early in August the Confederate intrenchments had only reached the Weldon Railroad, while the extreme left of the Federal line was on the Jerusalem Plank Road.

After the repulse of the mine assault, Lee felt his position so strong as to warrant him in detaching re-enforcements to Early, who, having given up the invasion of Maryland, was still hovering in the Valley of the Shenandoah. Only Kershaw's division was actually dispatched, although orders were ostentatiously given that Anderson, who yet commanded Longstreet's corps, should take the command. This would leave the north bank of the James only weakly defended, and Grant perceived in this a favorable occasion to menace Richmond. On the 13th of August, Hancock, with the Second Corps, and Birney, who had replaced Smith, and now commanded the Tenth, followed by Gregg's cavalry division, were sent across the James. To mask the movement, Hancock's force was embarked on transports, which were ostentatiously towed down the river as though their destination was Fortress Monroe, and thence up the Potomac to Washington. But, as soon as darkness set in, their course was reversed, and next morning, after some vexatious delays, they were landed at Deep Bottom, whence they advanced in the direction of Richmond. In the afternoon they came upon the enemy's intrenched line, upon the right of which an attack was made by Barlow with two of Hancock's divisions. This was vigorously repelled, and nothing was effected. Birney, on their left, gained some slight advantage. During the four succeeding days a series of brisk but undecided en-

¹ It has indeed been suggested that the works in front of Petersburg might have been operated against by a system of regular approaches. "Two saps," it is said, "might have been run, and, in the course of a month, there is every likelihood that the Confederate line might have been carried." But during that month the enemy would have had ample time to fortify an inner line to which he could fall back, and so the work would have to be repeated. Lee was too accomplished an engineer to neglect such an obvious precaution. When, in the end, the line of works, having been almost stripped of troops, was carried, there was found an inner line before which the overwhelming Union force was held in check. This inner line was never actually carried. It was abandoned by the Confederates when defeats in another quarter had rendered the abandonment of Petersburg a necessity. Those who suggest this course quite overlook the essential difference between the siege of a fortress, the capture of whose works involve the loss of every thing, and operations against a line defended by a series of parallel or concentric works, which may be continued to any number, the seizure of any one of which involves only the gain of a few rods of space.



UNION WORKS ON THE WELDON ROAD.

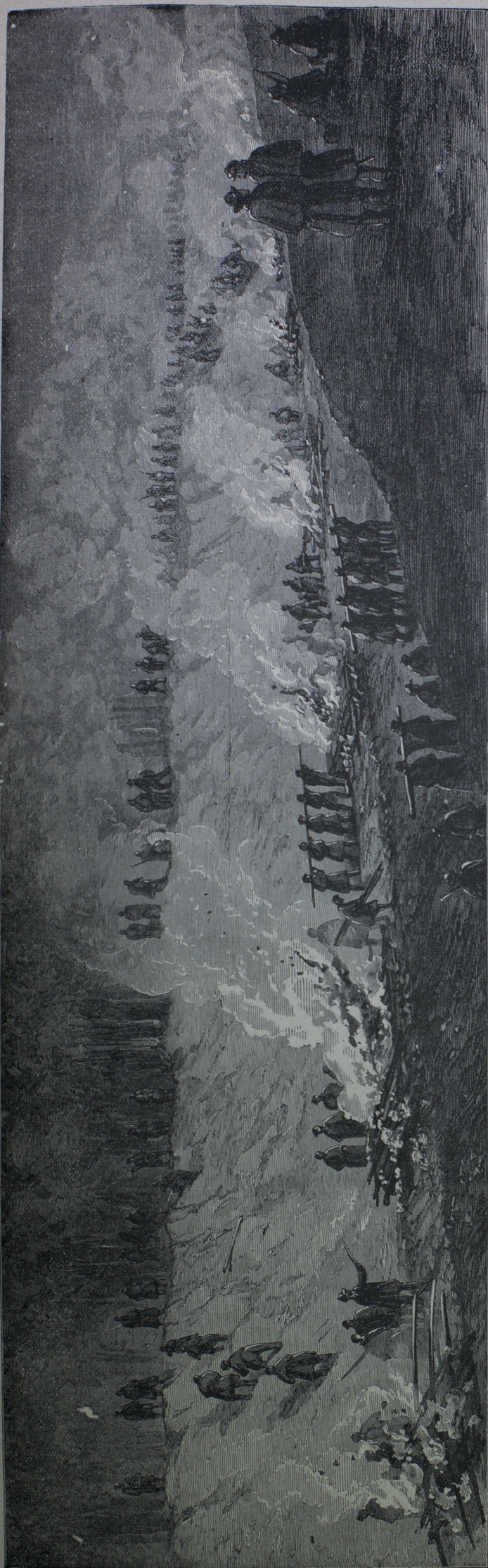
gagements was kept up, Hancock trying in vain to discover some weak point. Lee, in the mean while, by detaining two of the three divisions ordered to the Shenandoah, and withdrawing largely from those at Petersburg, had accumulated a force too strong to be formally assaulted. He even ventured, on the 18th, to assume the offensive by an attack upon Birney; but the assault was repelled with heavy loss. In this operation the Union loss was about 1500, of which two thirds fell upon the corps of Hancock. The Confederate loss was about the same.

The operation had failed in its ostensible and perhaps its immediate purpose to secure a position more directly menacing Richmond. It had, however, accomplished two ulterior objects. It had prevented large re-enforcements being sent to Early, and had, by weakening the force at Petersburg,

given a promising occasion for a movement against the Weldon Railroad. This was committed to Warren. On the 18th he moved quietly from his position on the extreme left, and struck the railroad without serious opposition at a point four miles below Petersburg. Leaving Griffin's division to hold this, he pushed Ayres's and Crawford's divisions for a mile up the road, until they found themselves confronted by the enemy drawn up in line of battle. Warren's position was a critical one. His corps was isolated, for its march had left a wide gap between itself and the troops on his right. The left of his advanced division also was approached by an obscure road of which he had no knowledge. Down this came the enemy, striking heavily upon Ayres, forcing him back for a space with heavy loss. The troops rallied, and the Confederates were repulsed in turn, Warren still holding



BRINGING IN PRISONERS BY NIGHT.



DESTRUCTION OF THE WELDON RAILROAD.

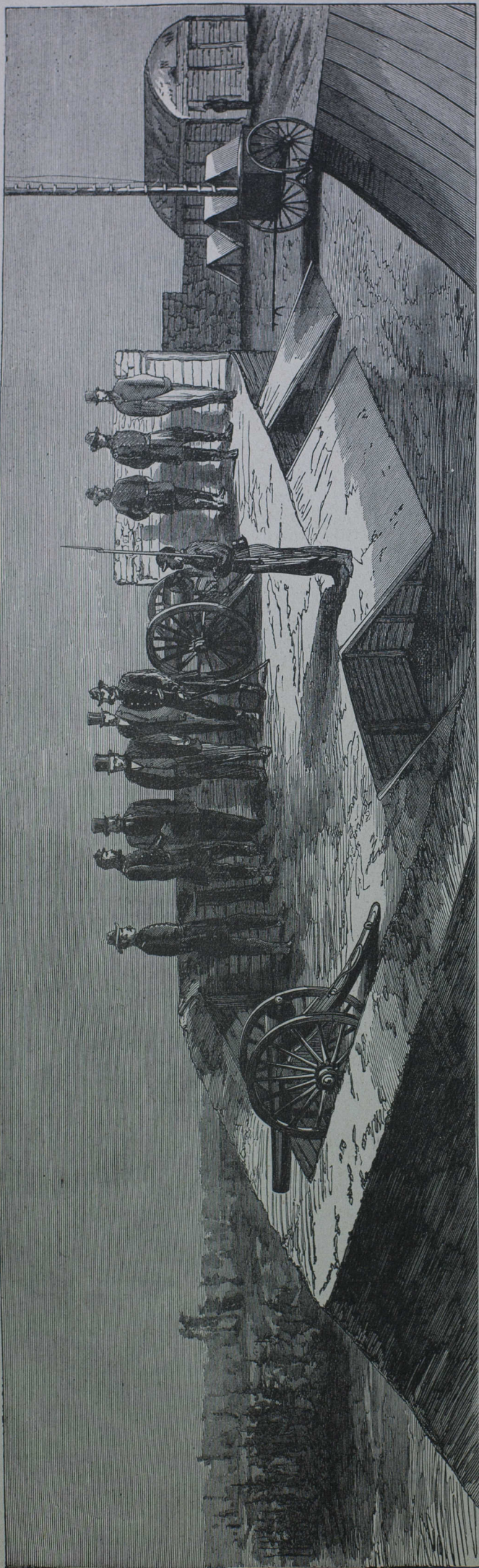
fast to and intrenching himself upon the railroad. This was of too great importance to be surrendered without a struggle. The next day Lee, having concentrated a powerful force, burst suddenly upon Warren. The wide space between Warren and Burnside had by some mischance been left uncovered. Into this broad gap Lee thrust Mahone's division, striking Warren's right, and, gaining its rear, pressed fiercely along it toward the left, throwing the whole line into confusion, and sweeping away more than 2000 prisoners, while at the same time Heth's division assailed the left. The core of Warren's troops still stood firm, and opportunely at the moment 2000 men from the Ninth Corps came upon the scene. With his whole force Warren now struck back upon his assailants right and left, and drove them back in confusion within their lines. On the 20th all was quiet along the lines, and Warren wisely passed it in strengthening the position against an attempt which he could not doubt would be made to regain it. On the morning of the 21st, Lee, having massed thirty guns, opened a fierce fire, under cover of which a heavy infantry force moved upon Warren's front, while another body endeavored to turn the left flank. The front attack was speedily repelled; the turning force met with still worse success; pushing heedlessly on, they encountered a fire so severe that they broke and fled in confusion, leaving behind 500 prisoners. So the Weldon Railroad was won, but at heavy cost. In the three days' struggle the Union loss was 4543, of whom more than two thirds were "missing."¹

It was now resolved to destroy the railroad for a dozen of miles south of the point where it was held by Warren. For this purpose a part of Hancock's corps, which had been withdrawn from across the James, with a brigade of cavalry, 8000 men in all, was dispatched on the 21st. In the course of the next two days the work was effectually performed for four miles, as far as Reams's Station, where hasty and ill-planned breastworks were erected. On the morning of the 24th it was pursued three miles farther, and orders were given that on the next day five miles more should be destroyed. Up to this time no enemy had been encountered, and none was looked for. But Lee had in the mean while sent a strong force under Hill down the Boydton Road, which showed itself on the morning of the 25th. Hancock then withdrew his infantry behind the breastworks at Reams's Station, the cavalry having been pushed some distance to the left. Two sharp attacks were made and repulsed. Hill then, assuming a position where his artillery could take Hancock's line in reverse, opened a hot fire, throwing the Federals into some confusion. This was followed by an impetuous charge, by which the disordered lines were broken through and three batteries captured. The breastworks were carried after a feeble resistance, and all seemed lost. Miles, whose lines had been broken through, succeeded in rallying upon a new line, where the advance of the enemy was checked, and one of the lost batteries regained. Night put an end to the contest, and Hancock in the darkness withdrew. Hill, not suspecting how small was the force opposed to him, also withdrew at the same time, and when morning broke the place was vacant save of the dead. Out of his 8000 men, Hancock had lost 2400, of whom almost three fourths were missing.²

Five weeks of almost unbroken quiet now ensued. To all seeming the armies of Lee and Grant had come to a dead-lock. Each lay behind intrenchments which it was hopeless for the other to assail. Men's eyes were turned to other quarters—to Georgia, where Sherman at Atlanta was watching the heady manœuvres of Hood, ready to take advantage of the first false move, and meditating the great March to the Sea; to the Valley of the Shenandoah, where Sheridan was operating against Early, who had for a month menaced the Federal capital; to Mobile, where Farragut was sealing up that important port, precious to the Confederacy as the last save Wilmington hitherto open to blockade-runners. Grant, meanwhile, was steadily tightening his grasp upon what he had won, and seeking to make this a base for farther acquisitions. The extension of his lines across the Weldon Road had compelled Lee in like manner to stretch his, so that it seemed that he could have left few troops north of the James, and that there was most likely an opportunity of gaining something in the direction of Richmond. On the 28th of September, Ord and Birney, with the two divisions of the Army of the James, crossed the river, and fell fiercely upon the strong works near Chapin's Bluff. One of these, Fort Harrison, was captured, but an assault upon Fort Gilmer was repulsed with heavy loss. Fort Harrison occupied a commanding position, and was the main defense of that part of the Confederate lines. Desperate attempts were made to retake it, but they were unavailing, and Butler held a secure position from which to threaten Richmond. This compelled Lee to maintain a larger force than before upon the north bank of the James.

¹ Killed and wounded, 1367; missing, 3176. The Confederate loss in killed and wounded was probably quite as great; in prisoners, hardly a sixth as many.

² Killed and wounded, 663; missing, 1769. The Confederate loss is stated by Pollard (*Lost Cause*, 607) to have been "720 killed, wounded, and missing;" of prisoners there were very few, so that the respective losses in killed and wounded were about equal. When we consider the character of the fighting during the seven days from August 18 to 25, and note the inordinate ratio of Union prisoners to the killed and wounded (2000 killed and wounded, 5000 missing), we are forced to the conclusion that the greater part of the prisoners were really deserters—the scum of the army who had been brought in by the enormous bounties which had been for some months paid for recruits and substitutes, the loss of whom was really a gain to the effective strength of the army. Of the 24,000 losses in the army of the Potomac during what may be strictly considered the siege of Petersburg, from June 20 to November 1, considerably more than 12,000 were "missing;" yet during this period there was no action excepting that at the mine, in which the Union forces were really defeated. The Confederates during that period, while losing fully 10,000 in killed and wounded, lost barely 2000 prisoners. There were, indeed, some thousands of deserters who sought refuge in the Union lines, and a still larger number who managed to escape from the army and regain their homes. Pollard (*Lost Cause*, 647), speaking of the manner in which, during the last year, the Confederate ranks were recruited, says: "It was not unusual to see at the railroad station long lines of squalid men, with scraps of blankets in their hands, or small pine boxes of provisions, or whatever else they might snatch in their hurried departure from their homes, whence they had been taken almost without an hour's notice, and ticketed for the various camps of instruction in the Confederacy. In armies thus recruited, it is no wonder that desertions were numerous; but for every Confederate soldier who went over to the Federal lines, there were hundreds who dropped out from the rear and deserted to their homes."



UNION WORKS BEFORE PETERSBURG.

The Confederates being thus strong upon their left, it was assumed that they must be weak on their right. To ascertain this, Warren was directed on the 30th to make a strong reconnoissance with two divisions of his own corps and two of the Ninth, now commanded by Parke. The reconnoissance was to be converted into an attack should the enemy prove to be in small force. Some works at Peebles Farm were taken and held; but Parke, pushing on, came upon the enemy in force, who charged upon him, threw Potter's division into rout, and swept off a thousand prisoners. Wilcox's and Griffin's divisions coming up, checked the pursuit, and the corps returned to the works which they had captured. Next day a fierce storm suspended operations. On the 2d of October a reconnoissance was pushed out, but the enemy had fallen back to his intrenchments. The loss in this operation was 2685, of whom 1756 were missing, mainly the unreliable recruits which had been added to Parke's corps. But the line had been extended three miles westward, and now reached within five miles of the Southern Railroad.

If this railroad could be seized, it would be equivalent to the capture of Petersburg. Grant, after long and careful preparation, attempted this with a force greater than he had put forth upon any one operation during the siege. The plan was to find the extremity of the Confederate intrenched line, turn it, gain the rear, and then move westward and strike the railroad. On the morning of the 27th of October the whole Army of the Potomac, leaving only sufficient men to hold the fortified line, was put in motion, both Grant and Meade accompanying the expeditionary force. Parke, who was posted at the extreme left, in the position which had been won ten days before, was to move out toward the Boydton Road, and, if possible, force the Confederate lines as far down as the crossing of Hatcher's Run. Warren was to support Parke, and, in case he was successful, was to closely press the retreating enemy; otherwise Warren was to cross the stream, march up its south side beyond the plank road, then recross, thus gaining the rear of the enemy's line, in front of which Parke would be posted. Meanwhile the main movement to the railroad was to be executed by Hancock. Marching down southwardly in the rear of Parke and Warren, he crossed the Run with slight opposition, then turning sharply to the northwest, he reached by noon the Boydton Road, whence a march of six miles would bring him to the railroad. Here he received an order from Meade to halt; for Parke, upon coming in front of the line which he was to carry, found it impenetrable. He therefore halted and intrenched himself. Hancock's corps was now wholly isolated, and the halt was ordered to give Warren time to execute his alternative movement, which would connect him with Hancock. Grant had by this time become convinced that it would be impossible to reach the railroad, and ordered the troops to be withdrawn to the fortified lines from which they had set out. Up to this time the enemy had not moved from his intrenchments, or shown any disposition to attack. Grant, having received an erroneous report that Warren had connected with Hancock, rode off to his headquarters at City Point, whence in the evening he sent a dispatch to Washington stating that there had been no serious fighting, intimating that he intended no offensive operation, but should hold his advanced position for a few hours to invite an attack from the enemy.¹

But there was no need to invite an attack upon a force so isolated as was that of Hancock. Warren had, indeed, promptly endeavored to connect with Hancock. Crawford's division crossed Hatcher's Run, and moved up the south bank through dense woods, wherein whole regiments lost their way. But by the middle of the afternoon he reached a point opposite the enemy's intrenchments on the opposite side of the stream, and within a mile of Hancock's right, which had been extended to meet him. Yet such was the difficult character of the intervening space, that each command was unaware of the precise position of the other. Hill meanwhile, apparently unaware of the approach of Crawford, had arranged an assault upon Hancock. Heth crossed the run between Hancock and Crawford, fairly turned the right of the former, and fell upon Mott's division, which, looking for an attack from another direction, was struck in the rear. Pierce's brigade gave way for a space, losing a number of guns. But Egan promptly changed front with his division, so as to face Heth, who had now become aware that Crawford was close upon his left. The Confederates, bewildered, changed front so as to expose their flank to Egan, who, with his own regiment and one of Mott's brigade, swept on, while De Trobriand's brigade and Kerwin's dismounted cavalry struck in front. The Confederates, overborne by the fierce rush, gave way, and were driven from the field, leaving behind them nearly a thousand prisoners. Had Crawford in the mean while advanced, the whole Confederate force, isolated by the stream, must have been captured. But, though so close at hand, the noise of the musketry was not heard through the forest. Two hundred of the Confederates, bewildered in

¹ "The Army of the Potomac, leaving only sufficient men to hold its fortified lines, moved by the enemy's right flank. The Second Corps, followed by two divisions of the Fifth, with the cavalry in advance, forced a passage of Hatcher's Run, and moved up the south side of it toward the Southside Railroad, which I had hoped by this movement to reach and hold; but, finding that we had not reached the end of the enemy's fortifications, and no place presenting itself for a successful assault by which he might be doubled up and shortened, I determined to withdraw within our fortified line. Orders were given accordingly. Immediately upon receiving a report that General Warren had connected with General Hancock, I returned to my headquarters."—*Grant's Report*. "Our line now extends from its former left to Armstrong's Mill; thence by the south bank of Hatcher's Run Creek to its crossing at the Boydton Plank Road. At every point the enemy was found intrenched and his works manned. No attack was made during the day farther than to drive pickets and cavalry inside of the main work. Our casualties have been light, probably less than 200 killed, wounded, and missing; the same is probably true of the enemy. I shall keep the troops out where they are until toward noon to-morrow, in hopes of inviting an attack."—*Grant's Dispatch*. From the wording of the report, it might be inferred that the withdrawal was ordered to be made during the afternoon of the 27th, and that therefore the fighting which ensued was in consequence of a violation of orders. But the dispatch shows that the withdrawal was not to be made till next day. Grant's direction for holding on until then was subsequently modified by Meade, who left it optional with Hancock to withdraw during the night of the 27th. For this whole operation, see especially Swinton (*Army of the Potomac*, 540-546), where will be found citations from the as yet unpublished reports of Hancock and Warren.



DUTCH GAP CANAL.

the woods, strayed within Crawford's lines, and gave themselves up as prisoners. Meanwhile Hampton, with five brigades, assailed Gregg's cavalry upon the Union left and rear. But Hancock, sending thither all of his force not actually engaged with Heth, held his ground. The Confederates had met a decided repulse; but Hancock's position was still critical. He was yet isolated and in front of the enemy in unknown strength, who would undoubtedly attack next morning with increased force. His ammunition was well-nigh exhausted, and it was not likely that it could be replenished in time. So, the option having been given by Meade, he withdrew that night, and retraced his way to the lines from which he had set out. It was well that he did so, for during the night Hill had massed 18,000 infantry and cavalry, with which he proposed to renew the attack at daybreak. The entire Union loss was 1900, of whom a third were missing. Most of this fell upon Hancock's corps, Parke's losing only 150, and Warren's probably about as many. The Confederate loss was probably greater in killed and wounded, certainly twice as great in prisoners, of whom 1200 were taken.¹

Butler's co-operative movement was feebly made and ineffectual. He pushed out two columns toward the Williamsburg Road and the York Railroad. The first column was checked at the outset, losing 400 prisoners; the second column carried a small fortified work, which it forthwith abandoned, and both returned to their former position. Thus the operation for which such ample preparation had been made, and from which so much had been expected, resulted in nothing beyond gaining some slight knowledge of the region, a knowledge which proved that the Southside Railroad could not be reached by that line. Yet the same costly experiment was made three months later, and with the like result.

The army now took up winter quarters behind its intrenchments, and during the remainder of the year no important operation was undertaken around Petersburg, although the quiet of the camps was broken by the continual picket-firing and artillery duels inevitable when two great armies lie intrenched face to face. Butler, indeed, was prosecuting a scheme from

tured 400 prisoners, three stands of colors, and six pieces of artillery. The latter could not be brought off, the enemy having possession of the bridge. In the attack subsequently made by the enemy, General Mahone broke three lines of battle, and during the night the enemy retired from the Boydton Plank Road, leaving his wounded and more than 250 dead on the field."

¹ Lee's dispatch gives a very inadequate view of this affair. He says: "General A. P. Hill reports that the attack of General Heth upon the enemy upon the Boydton Plank Road was made by three brigades under General Mahone in front, and General Hampton in the rear. Mahone cap-



RAID OF THE CONFEDERATE IRON-CLADS.

which he, and he alone, expected large results. Above Bermuda Hundred the James makes a double bend, first to the west, then south, thence east, and after a course of six miles returns to within less than half a mile of its starting-point. This tortuous bend was commanded by batteries which barred the farther ascent of the river. Butler proposed to dig a canal through the narrow isthmus, by which gun-boats could ascend the river and assail the Confederate works at Chapin's Bluff, and perhaps even force a passage to Richmond. The work, begun late in the summer, was prosecuted all through the autumn, mainly by details from the colored troops, not without considerable annoyance from the hostile batteries. At the close of the year the excavation was completed, save a narrow bulkhead at the upper end. On New-year's day this was blown up, but the earth fell back into the channel, leaving only space for a little rivulet. The Confederates forthwith established a battery opposite the mouth of the canal, which completely swept its whole length, and the scheme came to naught.

The Weldon Railroad meanwhile, though crossed by the Union intrenchments, and destroyed for some distance below, had not been rendered wholly useless to the Confederates. Cars still ran to within a few miles of the Union lines, and then freight, mainly supplies brought to Wilmington by blockade-runners, was hauled by wagons to Richmond. On the 7th of December Warren started out to destroy the road still farther down. The work was thoroughly and systematically done. The troops were formed in line of battle along the road. Each division destroyed that in its front; then each one moved down to the left, and so on in succession. In two days twenty miles of road were destroyed. At length the enemy were encountered in some force, strongly posted across the road. The expedition then returned, having marched a hundred miles in six days.

The communication with Wilmington was rendered somewhat more difficult, but was not wholly interrupted, for at this very period the supplies from hence saved the Confederate army in one of its sorest straits. On the 9th of December the commissary general reported that there were but nine days' food for Lee's army, producing also a letter from the commander stating that his men were deserting on account of short rations. On the 14th Lee telegraphed to Davis that his men were without meat. This disaster was only averted by the opportune arrival at Wilmington of several vessels loaded with supplies, which were then on their way to the army.¹

The capture of Fort Fisher on the 15th of January effectually closed the port of Wilmington, and thus compelled Lee to rely solely upon the Southside and Danville roads. Taking advantage of the absence of the iron-clads at Wilmington, the Confederates made a bold attempt to destroy the Union shipping in the James. On the night of the 23d of January, their three iron-clads, the Virginia, Richmond, and Fredericksburg, accompanied by five steamers and three torpedo-boats, dropped silently down the river, passed

Fort Brady, which covered the upper extremity of Butler's position, and broke the chain which had been stretched across the river opposite the lower end of the Dutch Gap Canal. The Fredericksburg got through the obstructions; the other iron-clads and the steamer Drewry grounded. The iron-clads returned, the Virginia being severely injured by a bolt from a monitor. The Drewry, being immovable, was abandoned and blown up.

As spring approached, and Sherman was beginning to move northward through the Carolinas, Grant wished to prevent Lee from dispatching any part of his army to the south. The immediate problem to be solved was entirely changed. Before it had been how to drive Lee out of Petersburg; now it was to keep him there for a space, until Sherman had swept away the forces opposed to him. An offensive operation must be undertaken, and there seemed to be no one except an essential repetition of that which had been attempted in October.¹

On the 5th of February, Warren's corps, accompanied by Gregg's cavalry, was sent to turn the Confederate lines at Hatcher's Run, while Humphreys, who now commanded the Second Corps—Hancock having been ordered north to organize a new corps—was to assail in front. Warren's route was nearly the same as that formerly taken by Hancock. Humphreys advanced to the Run, and was furiously assailed; but the attack was repelled, and at night the position was firmly held. Next morning Warren, who, having crossed the Run, had moved in the rear, came up, and the two corps were connected. Warren then pushed his left under Crawford up the west bank of the stream, through tangled woods and miry sloughs. Pushing before him a Confederate force under Pegram, Crawford went as far as he had gone in October. Here Pegram, re-enforced by Evans, made a stand, and in turn forced Crawford back. Meanwhile a Confederate force had made a detour around his left and rear. They struck Ayres's division, which was advancing to the support of Crawford, drove it in confusion upon Crawford, whose division also gave way and fell into rapid retreat. They fell back wildly to the position on Hatcher's Run, where Humphreys had hastily intrenched himself. The Confederates pursued fiercely; but, as they emerged into an open space, they encountered a sharp fire, and hastily withdrew into the shelter of the woods, whence they fell back within their lines. The Union loss in these two days was 2000; that of the Confederates less—probably not more than 1000. The only gain to the Federals was a farther extension of their line to the westward—an extension which might have been made without a battle. With this unsuccessful endeavor fell the curtain of the great drama, soon to be raised for the final short and stirring act.

¹ Thus only can we explain the movement now undertaken. Grant, in his report, refers to it only incidentally. He says: "The operations in front of Petersburg and Richmond until the spring campaign of 1865 were confined to the defense and extension of our lines, and to offensive movements for crippling the enemy's lines of communication, and to prevent his detaching any considerable force to send south. By the 7th of February our lines were extended to Hatcher's Run, and the Weldon Railroad had been destroyed to Hicksford."

¹ Pollard, *Lost Cause*, 649.