

# Headquarters 20<sup>th</sup> Maine Vols

## Field near Gettysburg, Pa.

July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1863

Lieut,

In compliance with orders from Brigade Hd. Qrs. I have the honor to submit the following report of the part taken by the 20<sup>th</sup> Regt. Maine Vols in the action of July 2d and 3d near Gettysburg, Pa.

On reaching the field about 4 p.m. July 2d, col Vincent commanding the Brigade, placing me on the left of the Brigade and consequently on the extreme left of our entire line of battle, instructed me that the enemy were expected shortly to make a desperate attempt to turn our left flank, and the position assigned to me must be held at every hazard.

I established my line on the crest of a small spur of a rocky and wooded hill, and set out at once a company of skirmishers on my left to guard against surprise on that unprotected flank.

These dispositions were scarcely made when the attack commenced, and the right of the Regt. found itself at once hotly engaged. Almost from the same moment, from a high rock which gave me a full view of the enemy, I perceived a heavy force in rear of their principal line, moving rapidly but stealthily toward our left, with the intention, as I judged, of gaining our rear unperceived. Without betraying our peril to any but one of two officers, I had the right wing move by the left flank, taking intervals of a pace or two, according to the shelter afforded by rocks or trees, extending so as to over the whole front then engaged; and at the same time moved

the left wing to the left and rear, making a large angle at the color, which was now brought up to the front where our left had first rested.

This hazardous maneuver was so admirably executed by my men that our fire was not materially slackened in front, and the enemy gained no advantage there, while the left wing in the mean time had formed a solid and steady line in a direction to meet the expected assault. We were not a moment too soon; for the enemy having gained their desired point of attack came to a front, and rushed forward with an impetuosity which showed their sanguine expectations. Their astonishment however was evident, when emerging from their cover, they met instead of an unsuspecting flank, a firm and steady front. A strong fire opened at once from both sides, and with great effect – the enemy still advancing until they came within ten paces of our line, when our steady and telling volleys brought them to a stand. From that moment began a struggle fierce and bloody beyond any that I witnessed, and which lasted in all its fury, a full hour. The two lines met, and broke and mingled in the chock. At times I saw around me more of the enemy than of my own men. The edge of conflict swayed to and fro – now one now the other party holding the contested ground. Three times our line was forced back, but only to rally and repulse the enemy. As often as the enemy's line was broken and routed, a new line was unmasked, which advanced with fresh vigor. Our "sixty rounds" were rapidly reduced; I sent several messengers to the rear for ammunition, and also for reinforcements. In the mean time we seized the opportunity of a momentary lull to gather ammunition and more serviceable arms, from the dead and dying on the field. With these we met the enemy's last and fiercest assault. Their own rifles and their own bullets were turned against them. In the midst of this struggle, our ammunition utterly failed. The enemy were close upon us with a fresh line, pouring on us a terrible fire. Half the left wing already lay on the field. Although I had brought two companies

from the right for its support, it was now scarcely more than a skirmish line. The heroic energy of my officers could avail no more. Our gallant line withered and shrunk before the fire it could not repel. It was too evident – we could maintain the defensive no longer. As a last desperate resort, I ordered a charge. The word “fix bayonets” flew from man to man. The click of the steel seemed to give new zeal to all. The men dashed forward with a shout. The two wings came into one line again, and extending to the left, and at the same time wheeling to the right, the whole regiment nearly described a half circle, the left passing over the space of half a mile, while the right kept within the support of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Penna. Thus leaving no chance of escape to the enemy except to climb the steep side of the mountain or to pass by the whole front of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Penna. The enemy’s first line scarcely tried to run – they stood amazed, threw down their loaded arms and surrendered in whole companies. Those in the rear had more time and gave us more trouble. My skirmishing company threw itself upon the enemy’s flank behind a stone wall, and their effective fire added to the enemy’s confusion. In this charge we captured three hundred and sixty eight prisoners, many of them officers, and took three hundred stand of arms. The prisoners were from four different regiments, and admitted they had attacked with a brigade.

At this time Col. Rice commanding the Brigade (Col. Vincent having been mortally wounded) brought up strong support from General Crawford’s command, and 3,000 rounds of ammunition. The wounded and the prisoners were now sent to the rear, and our dead gathered and laid side by side.

Shortly after Col. Rice desired me to advance and take the high steep hill, called “Wolf Hill” or “Round Top” half a mile or more to our left and front, where the enemy had assembled on their repulse – a position which commanded ours in case the assault should be renewed.

It was then dusk. The men worn out, and heated and thirsty – almost beyond endurance. Many had sunk down and fallen asleep the instant the halt was ordered. But at the command they cheerfully formed their lines once more, and the little handful of men went up the hill, scarcely expecting to ever return. The order not to disclose our numbers – as I had now but two hundred guns – and to avoid bringing on any argument in which I was sure to be overpowered. I forbid my men to fire, and trusted to the bayonet alone. Throwing out two small detachments on each flank, we rushed straight up the hill. The darkness favored us, concealing our force and preventing the enemy from getting range so that their volleys went over our heads, while – they deemed it prudent to retire before us. Just at the crest we found more serious difficulty and were obliged to fall back for a short time. We advanced again with new energy, which the knowledge of our isolated and perilous position rendered perhaps desperate, and carried the desired point. We took twenty-five prisoners in this movement, among them some of the Staff of Genl. Laws. From these officers I learned that Hood's whole division was massed but a short distance in front, had just prepared to advance and take possession of the heights, and was only waiting to ascertain the number and position of our force. I posted my command among the rocks along the crest in line of battle, and sent two companies in charge of judicious officers to reconnoiter the ground in front. They reported a large body of enemy in a ravine not more than two to three hundred yards distant. I therefore kept these two companies out, with orders to watch the enemy, while our main line, kept on the alert by occasional volleys from below, held its position among the rocks throughout the night. In the meantime the 83d Penn and the 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Penna Reserves came up and formed as a support. The next day at noon we were relieved by the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade.

We were engaged with Laws' Brigade, Hood's Div. The prisoners represented themselves as from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 47<sup>th</sup> Alabama and the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Texas Regts. The whole number of prisoners taken by us is three hundred and ninety three – of arms captured three hundred stand. At least one hundred fifty of the enemy's killed and wounded were found in front of our first line of battle.

We went into the fight with three hundred and fifty eight guns. Every pioneer and musician who could carry a musket was armed and engaged. Our loss is one hundred and thirty six killed, one hundred and five wounded – many mortally – and one taken prisoner in the night advance. Often as our line was broken and pierced by the enemy, there is not a man to be reported "missing".

I have to report the loss of a gallant young officer, Lt. W.S. Kendall, who fell in the charge. Also Capt. C.W. Billings mortally wounded early in the action, and Liet. A.N. Linscott mortally wounded on the crest of "Wolf Hill." Our advantage was dearly bought with the loss of such admirable officers as these.

As for the conduct of my officers and men, I will let the result speak for them. If I were to mention any I might do injustice by omitting some equally deserving. Our role of honor is the three hundred eighty officers and men who fought at Gettysburg.

My thanks are due the 83 Penna, Capt. Woodman, Comdg. for their steady and gallant support, and I would particularly acknowledge the service of Adj. Gifford of that Regt. who exposed himself to the severest fire to render me aid.

Very respectfully  
Your obed. Servt.  
J.L. Chamberlain  
Col. 20<sup>th</sup> Maine Vols.