

# 1864 Attack on Washington, DC: A Day's Difference

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The three inscriptions/presentations shown below were collected over a time interval of nearly 25 years. The participants' historical involvement was found to be closely connected to a little known sequence of events that could have altered the course of history during the Civil War's Shenandoah Valley Campaign in the summer of 1864.

**Major Eugene C. Gordon**, 6th Alabama, 60th Georgia,  
25th Battalion Alabama Cav., CSA

**Colonel James D. Visscher**, 43rd New York Infantry,  
6th Corps

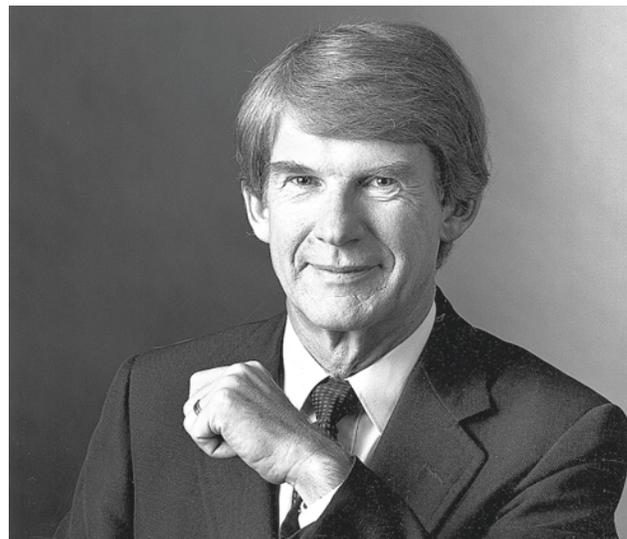
**Captain Martin Lennon**, 77th New York Infantry, 6th  
Corps

## THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY CAMPAIGN 1864, EARLY'S RAID

As the Union Forces of the Shenandoah Valley under General D. Hunter took Staunton on June 6, 1864 at the south end of the Valley, Confederate Leader General Robert E. Lee reacted. With Union General U. S. Grant close to Richmond and General W. T. Sherman slicing deeper into Georgia, Lee realized that only heroic measures could save the Confederate cause. With daily attrition cutting his ranks, his plan became daring but necessary. A force detached from Lee's ranks in Petersburg might threaten or even occupy Washington! This strong diversion would stave off the loss of Richmond, as well as gain recognition of the Confederacy abroad!

On June 12th, Lee called upon Jubal Early (Figure 1), a newly appointed Lieutenant General in command of the 2nd Corps, Stonewall's hard marching Valley veterans, to take his Corps from the Richmond lines and move to defend Lynchburg and break up Hunter's forces. If it worked well, panic in the northern capital might produce detachment of some of Grant's forces to save Washington.<sup>1</sup>

Early's Corps of about 14,000 men plus cavalry and artillery under Division Officers, Rodes, J. B. Gordon, and Ramseur, advanced on Hunter, who retreated, allowing little resistance as Early's forces moved up the Valley through New Market, Strasburg, Fisher's Hill, and Winchester. On July 9th, Early moved his headquarters and army across the Potomac River into Maryland.



Union General Lew Wallace (Figure 2), observing Early's rapid advance, could see the potential consequences of a possible Confederate dash toward Washington. With a small force of inexperienced troops, he proceeded to the banks of the Monacacy River as the following sequence of events played themselves out.

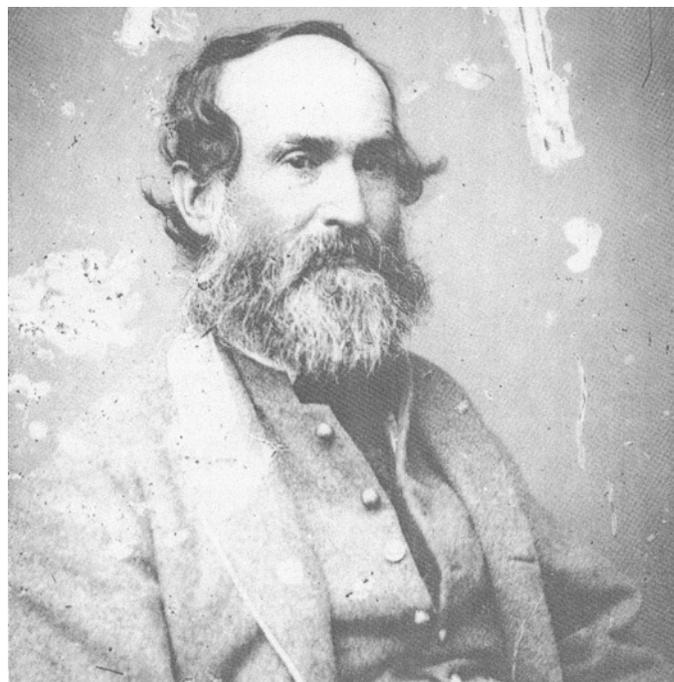


Figure 1. Lieutenant General Jubal A. Early, CSA, Valentine Museum.



Figure 2. General Lew Wallace, USA, U.S. Military History Institute. Governor of New Mexico, 1878–81 and author of *Ben Hur*.

MONACACY, JULY 9, 1864

As information spread of a large invading force of Confederates advancing up the Shenandoah Valley, Union General Lew Wallace, commanding the Middle Department headquartered in Baltimore, advanced at once to Frederick, MD, and then three miles south to the Monacacy River junction on July 5th. He decided to make a stand at this strategic crossroads (Figure 3). Wallace had three objectives: (1) to make the enemy disclose his strength; (2) to make him disclose where he was going; (3) if it was Washington, as suspected, to detain him long enough to enable General U. S. Grant to forward troops to defend the capital.<sup>2</sup>

At the Monacacy River the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad crosses an iron bridge. South of that a covered wooden bridge carried (Figure 4) the Washington Pike to Washington about 40 miles away and a stone bridge spanned the river for the highway to Baltimore. Two block houses and several rifle pits protected the railroad. Wallace, uncertain of Early's goal, organized his forces of about half home guards and half a division of the 6th Corps under General Ricketts (sent by Grant). He deployed Ricketts' men on his left flank to protect the Washington Pike and the home guards on the right flank and center so he could dispute the Confederates cross-

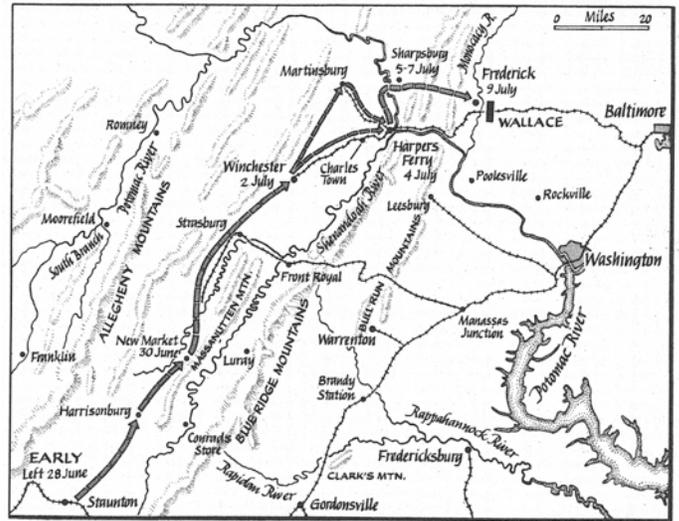


Figure 3. Shenandoah Valley Campaign 1864.

ing the river in either direction. At best he realized that with about 5,800 troops against Early's 20,000 to 30,000 men, he could only perform a delaying action.

July 9th dawned with a balmy sky as Confederate General Early arrived at the south limits of Frederick to view the Federal stronghold. He saw that Wallace, no mean foe, had shrewdly established a two-mile front covering the three avenues to the east. Estimating at least 7,000 Federals blocking his path, he knew a frontal attack would kill more men than he could afford. However, a flank attack could roll up the whole Federal line. Which flank was not a debate, since his objective was the Union Capital. He needed control of the Washington Pike. To accomplish this, he found a ford a mile south to cross the river. Early ordered General John B. Gordon's (Figure 5) division to cross the river, hopefully undetected by Wallace's watchful eye. However, Wallace saw the enemy crossing and at once set fire to the wooden bridge carrying the Washington Pike and redeployed these troops to help defend Ricketts' lines.<sup>3</sup>

At about 1:30 p.m. Ricketts observed the long gray lines of several brigades about 700 yards to his left front. He ordered a difficult maneuver falling back and changing fronts

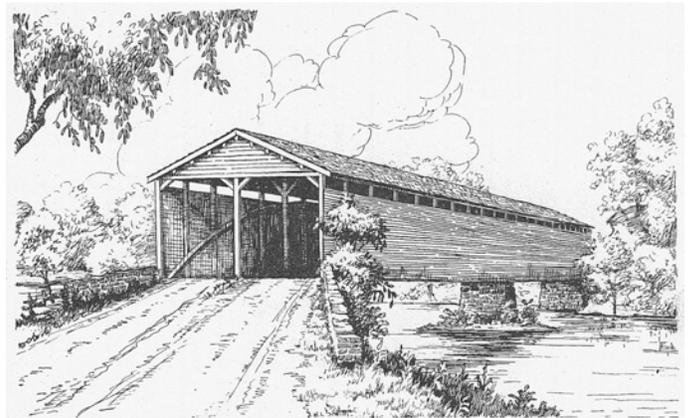


Figure 4. Covered Wooden Bridge, Monacacy Junction.



Figure 5. Major General John B. Gordon, CSA, National Archives.

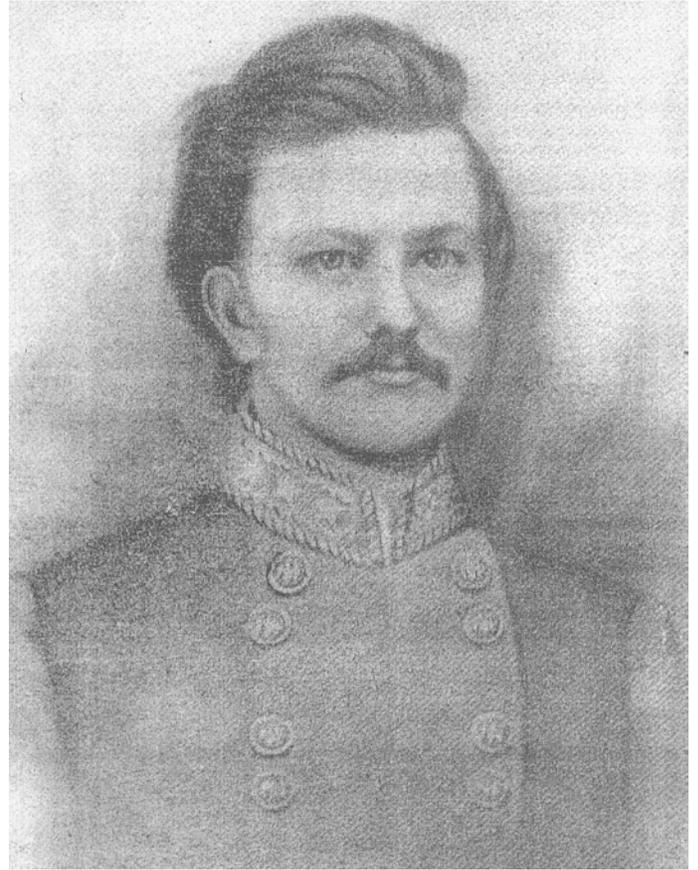


Figure 6. Brigadier General Clement A. Evans, CSA.

to parallel the road to Washington. This change of front did not escape Gordon's notice, well executed . . . seasoned soldiers. Now in his front not only loomed long lines of blue infantry, but terrain hazards. These fields were thickly dotted with grain stacks and farm fences, making it impossible to achieve an advance line.<sup>4</sup>

Gordon's initial attack on the Federal flank was made by Brigadier General Clement Evans (Figure 6), trusted leader of Gordon's largest brigade. He was badly wounded in the initial advance. In Gordon's own words, "But the execution of his orders were superintended by his staff officer, **Major Eugene C. Gordon** (Figure 7), who was himself severely wounded."<sup>5</sup>

General Evans later wrote of these experiences, "I was galloping along the front at the moment with **Capt. Gordon**, my aide, cheering the brigade forward and of course was a conspicuous mark for thousands of Federal rifles . . . on this day I rode in the path of one bullet . . . (**Capt.**) **Gordon** knew what to do—he gave the Senior Colonel notice of my fall and the gallant line swept right on . . . at this point the charge hesitated . . . at this juncture **Gordon** acted on my general instructions . . . riding along the line inspiring the brave fellows . . . so they charged again . . . driving the Federal forces before them . . . My wound was so threatening that my surgeons sought to dissuade me my purpose to move with them to Washington . . . Procuring a litter ambulance for myself

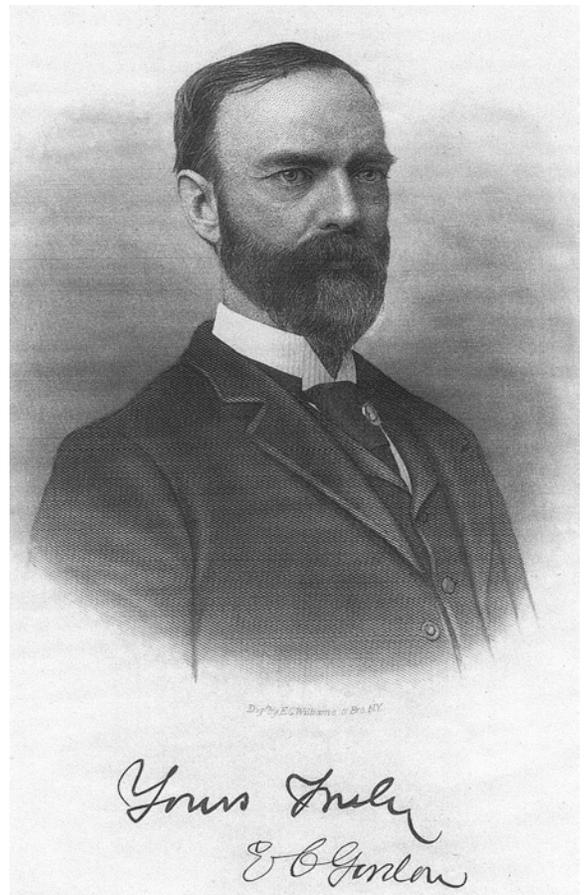


Figure 7. Major Eugene C. Gordon, CSA, Alabama Dept. Archives.

and **Capt. Eugene Gordon**, my aide, who was also wounded. We followed on that night at the rear of my brigade. We went down to Washington . . . ”<sup>6</sup>

The solid gold mounted presentation cane (Figure 8) inscribed, “**Maj. E. C. Gordon from his brother W.S.G.,**” was a postwar presentation to Major Eugene Cornelius Gordon, a younger brother of General John B. Gordon. He was born June 17, 1845, in Walker County, Georgia, son of Rev. Zachariah H. Gordon. His great-grandfather was one of seven brothers who came to the American colonies from Scotland and fought for independence in the Revolution. Along with his grandfather, a teenager at the time, they fought at the Battle of King’s Mountain.<sup>7</sup>

Eugene enlisted, in January of 1861, in a Georgia volunteer company made up of mountaineers with coonskin caps known as the Raccoon Roughs, commanded by his brother, Captain John B. Gordon. He was then not yet 16 years of age, and continuing in service, his company officially became Company I, Sixth Alabama Regiment.<sup>8</sup>

During the Battle of Gettysburg, he was back serving as aide-de-camp on the staff of his brother, now a Brigadier General, commanding a Georgia brigade. On July 1, 1863, Gordon’s brigade attacked the Union’s right flank, breaking the line and sending the Federal flying through the town to the hill behind. Ordered to stop by General Jubal Early in the afternoon, General Gordon, feeling this a fatal mistake, rode with his aide-de-camp, Eugene Gordon, at two o’clock the next morning to Generals Ewell’s and Early’s headquarters. They could hear the digging-in of the Union troops on Cemetery Hill all night, preparing for a Confederate attack in the morning.<sup>9</sup>

As reported by Eugene Gordon, years later, this “Council of War” consisted of Lieutenant General Ewell, Major Generals Early and Johnson, and Brigadier General J. B. Gordon. (General Lee did not reach the field until the second day.) Gordon urged the immediate forward attack, but was voted down due to the army needing rest. History shows that the Confederate army waited, losing the initiative. On the second day were the failed attacks on the right



Figure 9. Silver Cuspidor inscribed, “E.C.G.,” Eugene C. Gordon.

and left flanks and on the third day was the disastrous attack on the Union center.<sup>10</sup>

Eugene was offered a permanent staff position by General J. B. Gordon, but declined this advancement out of delicacy as coming directly from his brother. Soon afterward, on account of his gallant conduct at Gettysburg, he was elected Second Lieutenant of the 60th Georgia, of Gordon’s Brigade. When General Clement A. Evans succeeded command of the Brigade, upon promotion of General Gordon to division command, during the Wilderness Campaign, Lieutenant E. C. Gordon was appointed aide-de-camp on Evan’s staff, May 28, 1864. He was promoted to First Lieutenant by authority of the Secretary of War and signed by Major General J. B. Gordon. He served in this capacity at Cold Harbor and Early’s march through the Shenandoah Valley and his expedition against Washington, D.C., distinguishing himself at the Battle of Monacacy Junction, July 9, 1864.<sup>11</sup>

On January 25, 1865, Eugene tendered his resignation as First Lieutenant and A.D.C. of Evans’ staff. His resignation was accepted and, with letters of recommendation from General’s Evans and Gordon, he was appointed Major by President Davis, March 24, 1864, of the Provisional Army, Confederate States, State of Alabama. The following letters, written in that connection, reveal the character of his services:

Headquarters Gordon’s Division, February 21, 1865.  
Gen. S. Cooper, Adjutant and Inspector General:

Colonel Mead desiring an efficient officer to be appointed major and assigned to command of one of the battalions which he is raising, I have recommended my aide-de-camp, Lieut. Eugene C. Gordon, whom I regard as peculiarly well qualified for that particular line of service. He will be found to be very industrious, enterprising, reliable and brave, with a fondness for that kind of service, which will cause him to enter upon discharge of his duties with great spirit and activity. I respectfully ask a favorable consideration of his



Figure 8. Solid Gold Mounted Presentation Cane Inscribed, “**Maj. E. C. Gordon from his brother W.S.G.**”

claim, with the assurance that the government will not be disappointed. I am, general, your obedient servant.

C. A. Evans,  
Brigadier-General Commanding

Headquarters Second Corps, Army Northern Virginia,  
February 21, 1865.

Respectfully forwarded approved. Lieutenant Gordon has served under my command both as a line and staff officer. He gave entire satisfaction in the former capacity as a disciplinarian and drill officer. His courage is conspicuous. At the battle of Monacacy, MD., July 9, 1864, he greatly distinguished himself. After the wounding of Brig.-Gen. C. A. Evans, on whose staff he was serving, Lieutenant Gordon was, during the latter and severest part of the engagement, the only mounted officer left in the brigade with one exception. His conduct on that occasion attracted my attention and merits mention. He did great service in carrying the brigade forward, and had his horse killed and himself severely wounded while riding in front of the brigade within fifty yards of the enemy's line of battle. His qualifications as an officer and intimate acquaintance with the country fit him, I think, for the position he seeks.

J. B. Gordon,  
Major-General Commanding Corps.<sup>12</sup>

He was ordered to report to the 25th Battalion Alabama Cavalry (Figure 10). At 19 years of age, he was the youngest man to receive this commission. This was a field officer's position behind enemy lines late in the war.

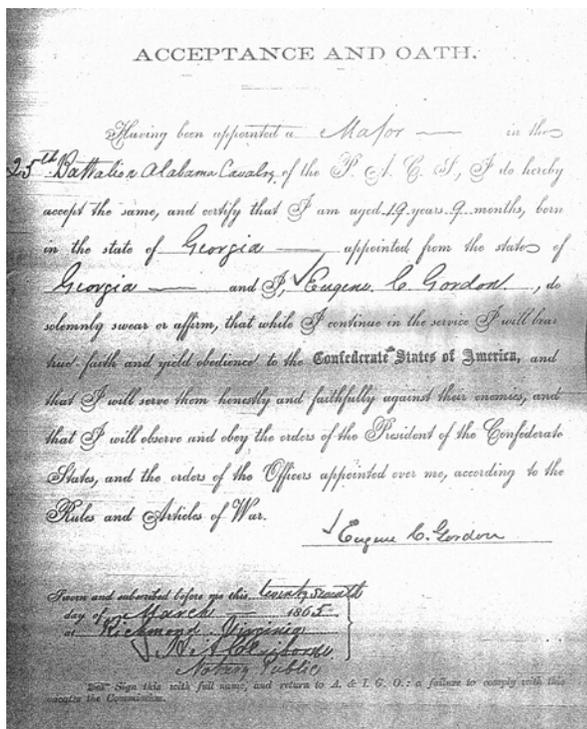


Figure 10. Acceptance and Oath, Eugene C. Gordon, National Archives.

He was on his way to join his command when he arrived in Columbus, GA, just as it was being approached by General Wilson's Federal Cavalry. Reporting to the state militia commander General Howell Cobb, he asked permission to get a musket to serve in defense of the city; however, he was asked to serve on the General's staff taking a conspicuous part in this fight April 16, 1865, one week after Appomattox. The 25th Battalion Alabama Cavalry surrendered at Huntsville, May 11, 1865.<sup>13</sup>

After the war, Eugene resumed his studies and embarked on the pursuits of a civil life. For many years he was very prominent in the development of the South, in particular, of Northern Alabama, giving his attention to railroad building, town improvement, and mining. He was associated with his brother, John B. Gordon, in several business enterprises, among them the building of the Georgia-Pacific Railroad, running between Atlanta and Birmingham, as well as the Clarkville and Princeton Railroad. He was originator, organizer, and President of the Decatur "Land, Improvement and Furnace Co." With cash capital of one million dollars, he aided in increasing the population of Decatur from 1000 to 9000 in 18 months.<sup>14</sup>

With his comrades of the war, Eugene maintained a general comradeship as a member of the Thomas H. Hobbs Camp, No. 400, United Confederate Veterans, Athens, AL, of which he was the organizer and twice commander (see Document, Figure 11).

Major Gordon was married in 1865 to Sallie Oliver, who died after two years. His second marriage was to Ella Cranshaw of Athens, Alabama. They had two daughters, Mabel and Eugenie. Major Gordon made his home in Alabama, moving to Amarillo, Texas a few years prior to his

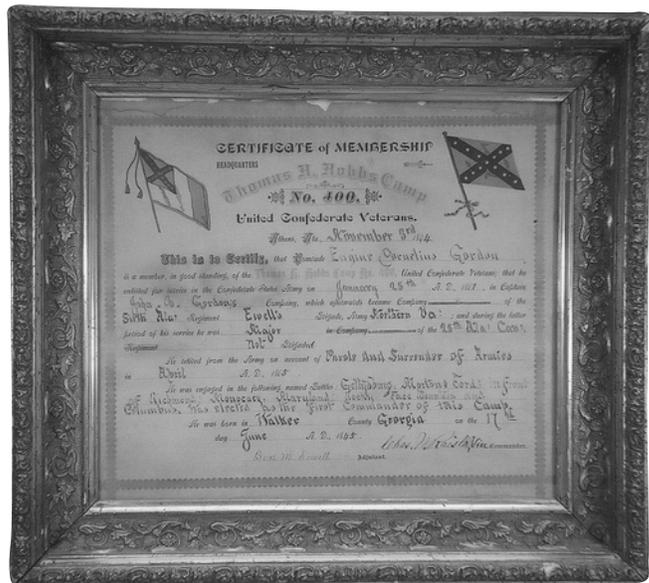


Figure 11. Framed Document: Certificate of Membership in the United Confederate Veterans dated November 13, 1894.

death in July 14, 1913, on a train from Tennessee to Amarillo.

Major E. C. Gordon's younger brother, Captain Walter Scott Gordon, the cane presenter (Figure 8), born February 22, 1849, was also a Confederate soldier, and undoubtedly the youngest captain in the Army.<sup>15</sup> From General John B. Gordon's *Reminiscences of the Civil War*, he states, "My youngest brother ran away from school before he was 15 years old as a captain of a company of school boys of his age and younger, who reported in a body to General Joseph E. Johnston at Dalton for service. They were too young for soldiers, and General Johnston declined to accept them for service, except that of guarding a bridge across the Chattahoochee River."<sup>16</sup>

Wanting active service, the company was permitted to disband and the members to re-enlist in other commands. Captain Walter S. Gordon re-enlisted in a Georgia regiment serving about Atlanta. He was later transferred to General Clement Evans' brigade, Army of Northern Virginia, October 7, 1864, serving upon the General's staff. He was listed as a courier when he surrendered at Appomattox, April 1865. He participated in a number of engagements about Petersburg and was severely wounded at the Battle of Hatcher's Run, February 5-7, 1865. This was the last principal Federal move to extend its lines prior to its final push in April 1865.

After the war, Walter graduated at the University of Georgia and became a law partner of Judge L. E. Beckley, Former Chief Justice of the State. Afterwards, he was associated with **Major Eugene C. Gordon** in the development of Sheffield and the Sheffield and Birmingham Railroad, among other projects, until his death in New York City in October 14, 1886. "These brothers were like Damon and Pythias in their devotion to each other."<sup>17</sup>

Captain Walter S. Gordon married Loulie McLendon of Atlanta, Georgia, having two daughters, Loulie and Linda.<sup>18</sup>

As the battle continued, "Between the two hostile lines there was a narrow ravine with a small stream . . . to and fro the battle swayed across this stream . . . . When the struggle ended a crimson current ran toward the river. Nearly half of my men and large numbers of the Federals fell there," stated J. B. Gordon. As Gordon's superior number pressed, the Union front collapsed. Ricketts urged his men back across the Washington Pike toward the Baltimore Highway, which was Wallace's retreat route. By 4:00 p.m. the day was over, and the battle was won by the Confederates. Breckinridge, who watched Gordon's attack with pride, warmly greeted the Georgian after the battle and remarked: "Gordon, if you never made a fight before, this ought to immortalize you."<sup>19</sup> The road was open to the Union Capitol. However, it was too late in the afternoon of July 9th to resume the advance. Early's army was tired and needed rest.

Wallace's delaying action had dealt a serious blow to the Confederate timetable, **One Day's Time**. He had determined the destination and strength of the Confederate forces, between 18,000 to 20,000.

If the day of battle had been hot, July 10th was hotter. With his army strung out in long lines on the dust-choked road, straggling grew worse. Early called a halt with his Army covering no less than 20 miles, half the distance to Washington.

#### FT. STEVENS, JULY 12, 1864

News of Lew Wallace's defeat at Monacacy and the enemy turning toward Washington, 40 miles away, brought panic to the streets of the Union Capital. Fear sparked the air; had the citizens known the disorganization and the extent of the military muddling, they would have fled the city. The War Department knew nothing of the Confederate raid, its numbers, or destination. Highly disorganized, they could only put 9,500 militia men in the 37 miles of entrenchments circling the capital. The experienced soldiers had gone to Grant's lines in Petersburg. If Confederate General Early came at Washington from Monacacy, he would hit the northern works held by only two militia regiments. Being persuaded that the threat was real, Grant ordered the remainder of the 6th Corps to Washington, expecting to arrive Monday, July 11th.<sup>20</sup>

Now with the enemy close at hand, one calm voice could be heard, of Lincoln, stating: "Let us be vigilant, but keep cool."<sup>21</sup> On the morning of July 11th, what happened in the next few hours would alter history. For the Confederacy, Washington lay a glittering prize, one which might convince the world of Southern invincibility. If Early could reach the city's defenses before Grant's men arrived, time would be the final arbiter!<sup>22</sup>

For Jubal Early, July 11th began hot, as the day and night before, taking its toll on his infantry. His columns were en route before sunup heading southeastward down the 7th Street road, hoping to storm the capital by nightfall. Around 1:00 p.m. explosions were heard from the direction of Washington. Siege Ordinance! The Confederates had come within range. Early rode alongside his weary regiments, attempting to close the ranks with stragglers growing with the temperature of the afternoon. From a point of vantage, Early examined his front, about 1,100 yards ahead loomed a large earthworks, Fort Stevens, protecting the 7th Street highway to the capital (Figure 12). As his glasses swept the situation, he found the fort feebly manned! Surely the defenders of Washington must know his direction of attack. If Fort Stevens had few defenders, then there must be few defenders for all of Washington. The prize was his; he had

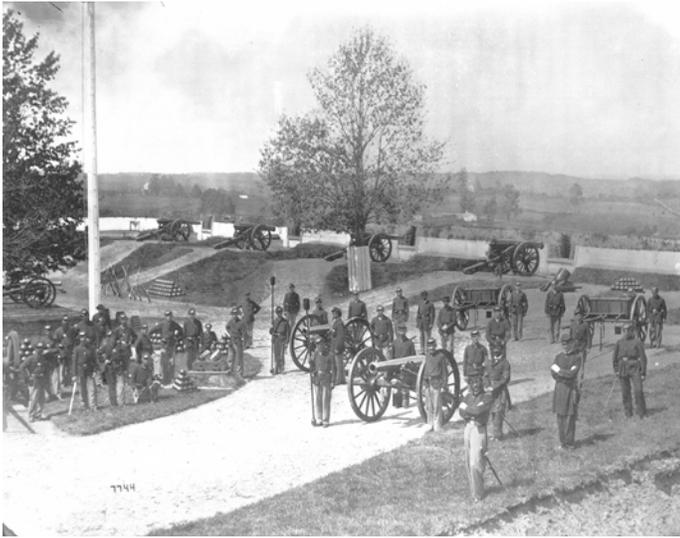


Figure 12. Fort Stevens, Library of Congress, LC B8171, 7744.

beaten Grant's men!<sup>23</sup> All he had to do was organize a line and occupy the works. Ordering one of his division commanders, Rodes, to throw out skirmishers and deploy a line of battle proved impossible due to the tired men being strewn out on the road<sup>24</sup> (Figure 13).

Suddenly, about 1:30 p.m., Early noticed a pall of dust lofting over Washington. As he looked long and hard through his glasses, he saw a column of bluecoats swing into view, marching out toward Fort Stevens. They wore the faded blue of old campaigners, Grant's men!<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, in the capital, amid vast confusion, rumors, and booming cannons, a cheer could be heard from the 6th Street docks. Crowds gathered as transports discharged a division of the old 6th Corps, the Greek Cross flying from their guidons, men renowned on the bloody Virginia fields. Commanded by General Horatio Wright (Figure 14), he brought a different spirit to the defenses of Washington. As he reached Fort Stevens, the situation had deteriorated; the Federal skirmish line was starting to give

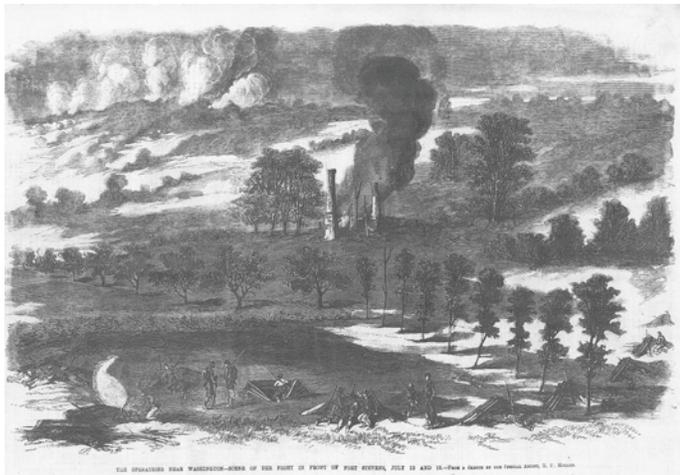


Figure 13. Battle in Front of Fort Stevens, Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, August 6, 1864.



Figure 14. Major General Horatio G. Wright, with 6th Corps Flag, USA.

way. Wright wasted no time ordering 500 men from his First Brigade to drive the Confederates back to the original skirmish line.<sup>26</sup>

Seeing this, Early's hopes began to fade. That evening he held a council of war, deciding to attack at dawn . . . , "Unless some information should be received before time showing its impracticability."<sup>27</sup> This information came as the July 12th sun came up; the field was clearly in view, with Fort Stevens' entrenchments all filled with blue uniforms. Green Union militia watched in terror as Rodes and Gordon threw out skirmishers and followed with long lines of battle. Older veterans observed that they were not in attack formation. Then the grayclads lay down in the wooded protection and the field lay tranquil with the mounting morning heat, while the Capitol dome loomed in the distance.<sup>28</sup>

As the Confederate skirmishers moved forward and the two houses offered cover for their sharpshooters, General Wright decided to drive the enemy from their protective locations. As he surveyed this potential battlefield, Wright ran into President Lincoln again out for a look at the war. He quired the President if he cared to view the scene of action, assuming he would not. Suddenly, to his horror, Wright saw

Lincoln join a group atop the fort's parapets. From the Confederate sharpshooter's roosts, long-range rifle shots rang out. Now Wright, standing next to the President, urged him to step down. Still the tall figure in the stovepipe that looked out. A thud and one of the officers near Lincoln fell. Not far from them a young captain looked up and exclaimed to the President, "Get down, you fool!" Amused by the brash words of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Lincoln heeded his advice.<sup>29</sup> This action at Fort Stevens marked the only instance in our history where an American President came under fire from an enemy.

Wright ordered the Third Brigade of his 6th Corps to deploy and follow the skirmishers. The lines of battle were as follows<sup>30</sup>:

**43rd New York** 7th Main 49th New York  
**77th New York** 61st Penn. 122nd New York

At 6:00 p.m. the artillery started signaling the advance, which was met by a sheet of flames from the wooded area. Ranks fell, and gaps appeared. After stubborn fighting, the Confederates retired as nightfall stalled the progress. The field and hills had been won by the Federals losing almost one-quarter of their men in action. **Captain Martin Lennon, 77th New York** (Figures 21 and 22), participated in the initial attack and **Colonel James D. Visscher** (Figure 15), leading the **43rd New York**, was killed in action as President Lincoln looked on.<sup>31</sup>

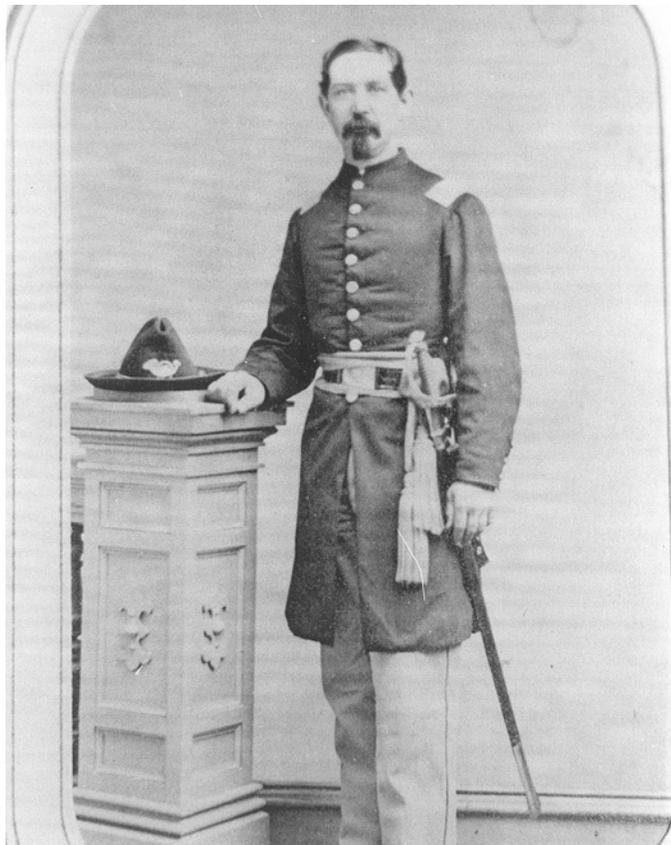


Figure 15. Lieutenant Colonel James D. Visscher, 43rd New York.

Visscher's Smith & Wesson Model 2 Army is inscribed on the back strap, "**Capt. J. D. Visscher—43rd N.Y.**" This fully blued .32 r.f. revolver manufactured in 1864, serial number 18660, was most likely presented to the then captain of Company G by officers or friends upon promotion to command the regiment (Figures 16 and 17).

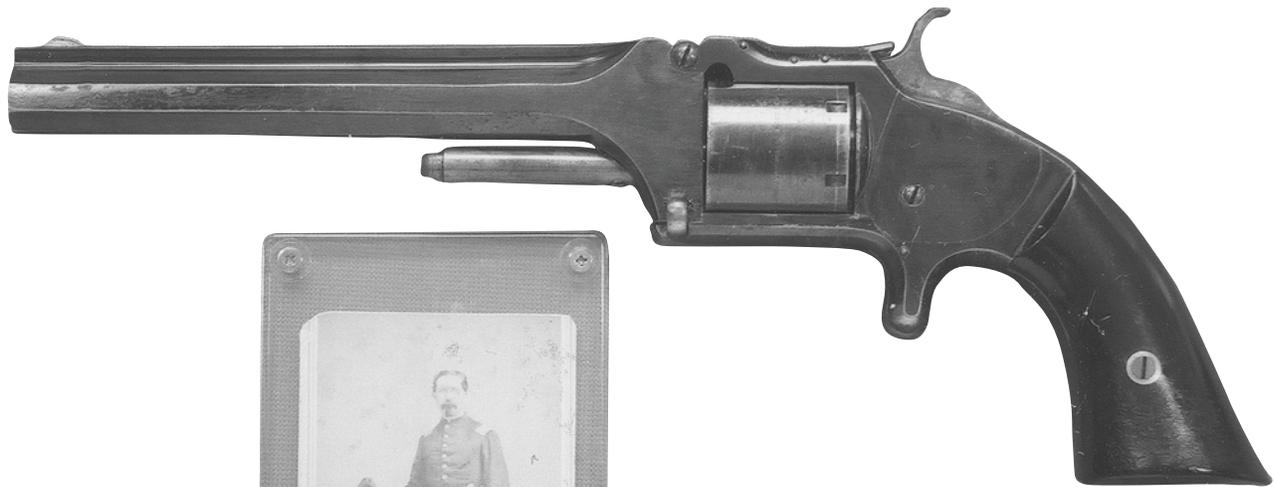
This inscribed Smith & Wesson revolver was carried by Captain (later Colonel) James D. Visscher, 43rd New York Volunteers in the Civil War. Col. Visscher came from a prominent New York family whose ancestors came from Holland and settled in the Albany area in 1644.<sup>32</sup> Visscher was born in Albany, New York, in 1829 and was a book-binder by trade before the war. He left home with the "Burgesses Corps" from Albany to join the 25th New York State Militia Regiment, then at Arlington Heights, Virginia. The regiment served at and near Washington from April to August 1861, before it was mustered out of service.

He re-enlisted in August, 1862, and was appointed captain, Co. G, 43rd N.Y. Volunteers, in command of the company when it was mustered into service September 14, 1862. His company joined the regiment in Virginia and fought at the Battle of Antietam, September 17, 1862. It was on duty in Hagerstown, Maryland, until October 30th and moved to Falmouth, Virginia until November 19th. He led his company at the Battle of Fredericksburg, December 13, 1862, and in the "retreat," or "Mud March," after that battle, January 20–24, 1863.

Captain Visscher remained on duty again in Falmouth until April, 1863, and then fought in the Chancellorsville Campaign, April 27–May 6, 1863, and the battle of Gettysburg, July 1–3, 1863. He took part in the Pursuit of Lee, July 25–August 14, 1863, and remained on duty with his regiment on the Rappahannock until November, 1863. He took part in the Mine Run Campaign, November 26–December 2, 1863, after which he was transferred to Co. E on December 20th. He remained in command of that company at Brandy Station until May, 1864.

Visscher personally distinguished himself while leading his company through the battles of the Wilderness, May 5–7, 1864, and Cold Harbor, June 1–2, 1864, and especially at Spotsylvania, May 12–21, 1864, after which he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel for gallantry in action on May 12, 1864 (Figure 18).

Taking command of the entire 43rd Regiment at Petersburg, Virginia, June 17–July 26, 1864, he moved to Washington, DC, to help defend the capital and was stationed at Fort Stevens. At the same time General Grant had depleted the ranks of infantrymen and artillerymen in the capital in an effort to bolster the ranks of his army in the campaign against Richmond. Little did he realize that he could have signaled the doom of Washington by leaving it practically defenseless.



**Figure 16. Smith & Wesson Model 2 Army, Inscribed on Backstrap "Capt. J. D. Visscher—43rd N.Y.," shown with original signed CDV.**



**Figure 17. "Capt. J. D. Visscher—43rd N.Y." Inscription.**

As described earlier, on the afternoon of July 12th, an assault was planned to drive back the Confederate forces in front of Fort Stevens before they attacked. The 7th Maine, 43rd New York, and 49th New York regiments were chosen. As the batteries of Fort Stevens opened fire, the chosen regiments dashed forward, surprising the enemy.

In Dr. Stevens', historian of the 6th Corps, own words, "In magnificent order and with light steps, they ran forward up the ascent, through the orchard, through the little grove on the right, over the fence, up the road, making straight for the first objective point, the frame house "lay" in front. The rebels, at first stood their ground, then gave way before the impetus charge and though forced to seek safety in flight, turned and poured their volleys into the ranks of their pursuers. Lt. Col. Johnson, commanding the 49th N.Y. . . . fell mortally wounded. Col. Visscher of the 43rd N.Y., was killed. Major J. P. Jones,

commanding the 7th Main, was also slain; and Major Crosby, commanding the 61st Penn. was taken to the hospital . . . Col. W. B. French of the 77th N.Y. was injured. The commanding officer of every regiment in the brigade was either killed or wounded."<sup>33</sup> This ended the Battle of Fort Stevens. The body of gallant Colonel Visscher was returned home, where he was buried with

military honors in the Albany Rural Cemetery.

General Early, his objective lost, had decided to retreat under cover of darkness, thus ending the threat on the Union capital. Early, commenting to one of his officers, said, "Major, we haven't taken Washington, but we've scared Abe Lincoln like hell!"<sup>34</sup> The hard marching and almost continuous skirmishing had taken a toll of Jubal's thin ranks. The cost of scaring Abe Lincoln ran to about 2,000. He had started with 12,000.<sup>35</sup>

#### CEDAR CREEK, OCTOBER 19, 1864

Failing in his raid on Washington, Confederate General Jubal Early's forces remained in the Valley as a diversion for Grant's siege on Petersburg. Determined that Early not escape punishment, Grant, in August, 1864 sent General Phil Sheridan (Figure 19) with 30,000 troopers to pursue and eliminate Jubal Early's forces. This cavalry leader had proven

<i>Q</i>   43   N. Y.	<i>V</i>   43   N. Y.
<i>James D. Visscher</i> .....	<i>James D. Visscher</i> .....
<i>St. Rob. Co.</i> ....., 43 Reg't N. Y. Infantry.	Rank <i>St. Col.</i> , 43 Reg't N. Y. Inf.
Appears on <b>Regimental Return</b>	Appears on
for <i>July</i> ....., 1864	<b>Field and Staff Muster-out Roll</b>
Present or absent.....	of the organization named above. Roll dated
Gain or loss.....	<i>Albany, N. Y., Oct. 11, 1864</i>
Date..... 186	Muster-out to date....., 186
Place.....	Last paid to <i>Feb. 29, 1864</i>
Remarks: <i>Killed in action</i>	Clothing account:
<i>July 12th 1864 at Battle of</i>	Last settled....., 186; drawn since \$..... 100
<i>Fort Stevens etc.</i>	Due soldier \$..... 100; due U. S. \$..... 100
	Am't for cloth'g in kind or money adv'd \$..... 100
	Due U. S. for arms, equipments, &c., \$..... 100
	Bounty paid \$..... 100; due, \$..... 100
	Remarks: <i>Promoted from</i>
	<i>Capt. Co. 4</i>
	<i>Killed</i>
	<i>in action July 12, 1864</i>
Book mark:.....	Book mark:.....
<i>P. J. Evans</i>	<i>Long</i>
(1852) Copyist.	(1852) Copyist.

Figure 18. Lieutenant Colonel Visscher's Military Records, National Archives.

himself a willing and efficient fighter. Initially, Early was successful in hit-and-run attacks against superior forces through the late summer and early fall. He attacked the stronger foe at Winchester and Fisher's Hill with some success, but with fewer and fewer men.<sup>36</sup>

After defeating Early at Fisher's Hill on September 22nd and believing that he had fled the Valley, the Federal commander gave up the chase and began to lay waste, burning crops, in the Upper Valley. Lee returned Kershaw's division to Early's main force, now about 20,000 strong. Enraged at Sheridan's wanton destruction, Early slipped back into the Valley. Fearing lack of supplies, Early decided to attack the unsuspecting Federals as they lay in camp at Cedar Creek.

General John B. Gordon, commanding three divisions, came up with a plan to attack the Federal left, which they thought had a natural protection of the impassible Massanutten Mountains with the Shenandoah River at its base. Gordon found a dim, narrow pathway that only one man could pass at a time, but by starting the movement at nightfall, the entire Corps could pass by sunup. Early finally adapted the plan. The men, stripped of canteens and anything else that would make noise to arouse Sheridan's pickets, proceeded across the river in the early morning to the left flank of Sheridan's sleeping army.<sup>37</sup>

The morning of October 19, 1864 was exceedingly damp and chilly; a dense fog settled down over the ground to aid the attack. Gordon's divisions surprised and completely

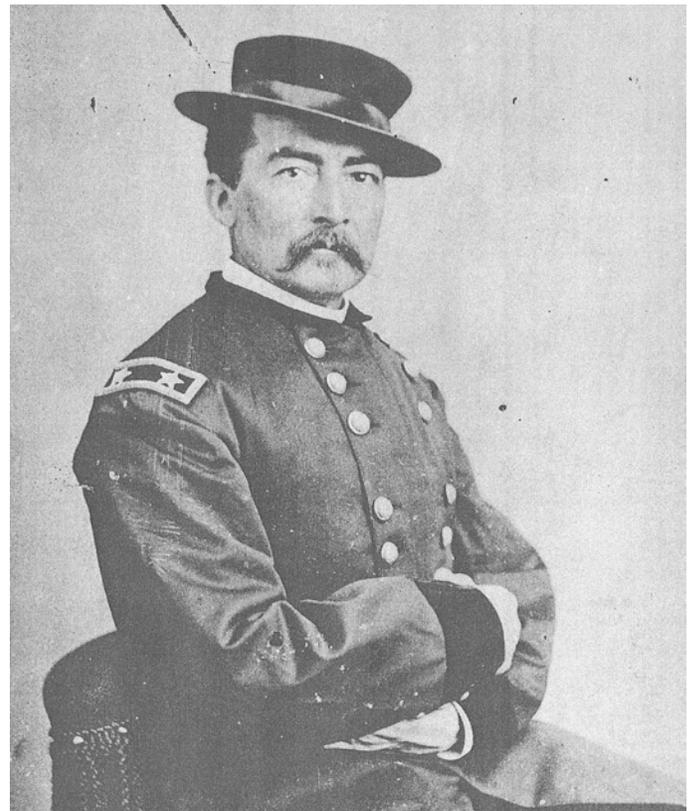


Figure 19. Major General Phillip H. Sheridan, USA, Library of Congress.

routed the sleeping Federals, while Kershaw attacked the Union right across Cedar Creek. As the sun rose and the fog lifted, the Confederates had full possession of the camps and earthworks of the Federal 8th and 19th Corps<sup>38</sup> (Figure 20).

As Sheridan was in Washington at a conference, General Horatio Wright (Figure 14) was in charge of the Federal forces. He called for the 6th Corps to come up from reserve. Early's advance, sweeping all before them in the dense fog and smoke, began to meet resistance by a staunch handful of troops commanded now by General Getty of the 6th Corps. Wright was shot about 9:00 a.m. A division of the 6th Corps marched to the Winchester Pike and formed a line at the crest of a small hill. The Confederates made three charges but could not get over the hill.<sup>39</sup> In the last charge, General Bidwell, 3rd Brigade, was killed and the command went to Colonel French of the **77th New York**. **Captain Martin Lennon** was mortally wounded during this enemy charge (Figures 21 and 22).

Captain Lennon's presentation Smith & Wesson Model 2 is inscribed on a solid silver butt plate "**Presented to Capt. Martin Lennon by Co. I 77th Regt. N.Y. Vo.**" The revolver was manufactured in about November, 1863, Serial No. 15074, and would have been presented by his men the following year prior to his untimely death in November 1864. It is in unused condition with a blued finish and rosewood grips. It is shown in an original factory casing, with a rare cleaning rod, and a box of .32 r.f. Hall & Hubbard Cartridges, patented April 17, 1860 (Figures 23 and 24).



THE CONFEDERATE ARMY, UNDER GENERAL EARLY, DRIVING BACK THE SIXTH, EIGHTH AND NINETEENTH FEDERAL CORPS, UNDER GENERAL WRIGHT, AT CEDAR CREEK, VA., ON THE MORNING OF OCTOBER 19, 1864.—FROM A SKETCH BY J. E. TAYLOR.

Figure 20. Battle of Cedar Creek, Oct. 19, 1864, Civil War in the United States, *Harper's Weekly*.

As a school teacher from Essex County, NY, Martin Lennon, age 22 enlisted at Keenseville, NY, in the 77th New York Regiment on October 1, 1861. He served as a First Sergeant until November 23, 1861 when he was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant in Company I. The 77th was attached to the Army of the Potomac, seeing action in the Peninsula Campaign, Lee's Mills, Yorktown, Williamsburg, and the Seven Days before Richmond. After McCellan's evacuation of

Harrison's Landing and after moving to Alexandria, VA, Lennon was commissioned captain, August 18, 1862.

The 77th participated in many prominent battles such as Antietam, Malvern Hill, Fairfax Court House, Federicksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Wilderness, "Bloody Angle" Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, Petersburg, and Fort Stevens, to stop Early at Washington, DC.

Joining Sheridan's Shenandoah Valley Campaign in 1864, the 77th fought at Winchester, Fisher's Hill, and at Cedar Creek, on October 19, 1864, where Capt. Lennon was severely wounded. Captain Lennon died November 1, 1864 from his wounds (Figure 25).

Being part of the official records in the *Fifth Annual Report of the New York State Bureau of Military Statistics, 1868*, Captain Lennon's letters and extracts from his diary contain detailed military accounts starting with the Peninsula Campaign at Lee's Mills, VA, in 1862, until three days before he was wounded. His last entry read "Oct. 16—stood under arms one hour. All quiet."



Figure 21. 2nd Lieutenant Martin Lennon, Co. I, 77th New York, N.Y. State Military Museum.



Figure 22. Captain Martin Lennon, 77th New York, N.Y. State Military Museum.

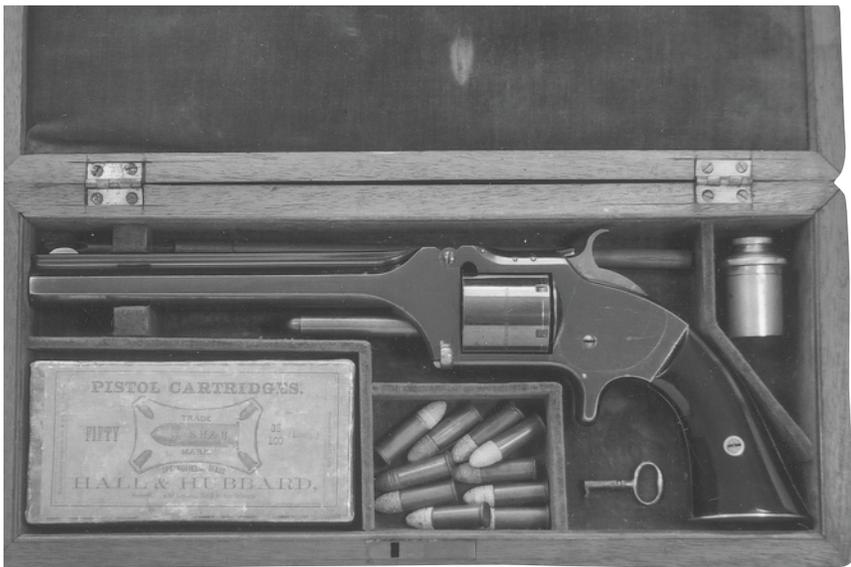


Figure 23. A Presentation Smith & Wesson Model 2 Army, Inscribed on Butt Plate, "Presented to Capt. Martin Lennon by Co. I 77th Regt. N.Y. Vol."



Figure 24. Captain Lennon's Presentation Inscription.

A tribute to Captain Lennon from the report follows.

"Captain Martin Lennon, of Company I, 77th Regiment, was wounded by a ball in the left shoulder, in action at Cedar Creek, October 19, 1864 and died November 1, 1864 following. He was a brave, competent and worthy man. The diary from which the foregoing pages were copied, is stained with blood, and contains the remnant of a pencil, with which he made his entries. He was a school teacher before entering the service.

E. M. Rutenber

Albany, December 28, 1864."

By midday, the battle had reached a critical juncture; the expended Confed-erates were now attacking piecemeal and were easily repulsed. Early, assuming the entire 6th Corps was in his front, ordered a fateful pause to rest his exhausted men. While the Confederates rested at about 11:30 a.m., up the Federal line cheering could be heard. Down the pike, an officer on a powerful black charger covered with foam came tearing up to General Getty demanding to know the state of battle. After a few words, he rode down the line and in a ringing voice shouted "Men, by God, we'll whip them yet, we'll sleep in our old camp tonight." This was Sheridan (Figure 19), returning from Washington. The men sprang to their feet and cheered.<sup>40</sup>

At 4:00 p.m., bringing reinforcements and the cavalry, Sheridan attacked, driving the Confederates from the field.

This victory to all extents at Cedar Creek ended the Confederate threat in the Shenandoah Valley.

Again, Early failed to take advantage of the opportunity for victory because there was only a division of the 6th Corps in his front. He could have sent the whole Union forces back to Winchester. With Sheridan's arrival, it vanished. Getty's division of the 6th Corps stand on that small hill saved the day for Sheridan and the routed Federal forces.

Early remained in the Valley and by winter his ranks had dwindled to about 4,000 men. Sheridan opened the year of 1865 with a march up the Valley as part of Grant's program for a knock-out offensive in the spring. Early met the offensive but he could not hold the bluecoats. With barely a Corporal's Guard of 1,000 men left at Waynesboro, he met about 15,000 Federals, a complete rout, and the

Army of the Valley was no more.<sup>41</sup>

Jubal Early prolonged the war through the winter of 1864, a successful diversion. However, if he were not detained by Lew Wallace, the true hero, for a day's time at Monacacy and was able to brush by the small militia forces at Fort Stevens, before the 6th Corps arrived, he very well might have altered the course of history!

NOTES

1. Frank Vandiver, *Jubal's Raid* (New York, 1960), p. 19.
2. Glenn H. Worthington, *Fighting for Time* (Shippensburg, PA, 1985), p. 55.
3. Vandiver, p. 108-11.

<p><i>L</i>   77   N. Y.</p> <p><i>Martin Lennon</i> Capt., Co. I., 77 Reg't N. Y. Infantry.</p> <p>Appears on <b>Regimental Return</b> for <i>Oct</i>, 1864. Present or absent..... Gain or loss..... Date....., 1864. Place..... Remarks: <i>Wounded Oct 19, 1864</i> Book mark:.....</p> <p>(852) <i>J. J. Black</i> Copyist.</p>	<p><i>L</i>   77   N. Y.</p> <p><i>Martin Lennon</i> Capt., Co. I., Battalion 77 N. Y. Infantry.</p> <p>Appears on <b>Regimental Return</b> for <i>Nov</i>, 1864. Present or absent..... Gain or loss..... Date....., 1864. Place..... Remarks: <i>Died of Wounds Nov 1, 1864</i> Book mark:.....</p> <p><i>J. J. Black</i></p>
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Figure 25. Captain Lennon's Military Records, National Archives.

4. Ibid., p. 114.
5. John B. Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York, NY, 1904), p. 312-313.
6. Robert G. Stephens, Jr., *Intrepid Warrior; Clement Anselm Evans* (Morningside, 1992), p. 425-426.
7. Frances B. S. Hodges, *Gordons of Spotsylvania County, VA* (Wichita Falls, TX, 1934), p. 12-22.
8. *Confederate Military History: A Library of Confederate States History, Extended Edition* (Atlanta, GA, 1899), p. 585.
9. Maj. E. C. Gordon, *Confederate Veteran* (Wendell, NC), p. 465.
10. Ibid., p. 465.
11. *Confederate Military History*, p. 585.
12. Ibid., p. 586.
13. Ibid., p. 587.
14. Ibid., p. 587.
15. Ibid., p. 587-588.
16. J. B. Gordon, *Reminiscences*, p. 302.
17. *Confederate Military History*, p. 588.
18. Hodges, p. 22.
19. Vandiver, p. 118.
20. Worthington, *Fighting for Time*, p. 174-175.
21. Vandiver, p. 147.
22. Ibid., p. 149.
23. Ibid., p. 152.
24. Worthington, p. 188.
25. Vandiver, p. 153.
26. Ibid., p. 159-160.
27. Ibid., p. 155-156.
28. Ibid., p. 165.
29. Ibid., p. 168.
30. William V. Cox, *The Defenses of Washington* (Washington, DC, 1901), p. 17.
31. Ibid., p. 18-19.
32. S. V. Talcott, *New York and New England Families* (Baltimore, MD, 1973), p. 266.
33. Cox, p. 18.
34. Vandiver, p. 171.
35. Ibid., p. 172.
36. Ibid., p. 175-176.
37. J. B. Gordon, p. 334-338.
38. Gen. H. Stevens, *Battle for Cedar Creek* (Gaithersburg, MD, 1987), p. 16.
39. Ibid., p. 31-38.
40. Ibid., p. 42.
41. Vandiver, p. 177.

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