Notes on Rebel Routes and Artillery

By
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Richard S. Ewell, commander of the Army of Northern Virginia's II Corps, was boss normally of three divisions, under Early, Johnson and Rodes.

Early had been detached from the corps at Shepherdstown, W. Va., and sent toward York while Johnson was charged with guarding a 13-mile-long wagon train. Thus at Carlisle, Ewell had active control of Rodes only.

On June 30 when Ewell was ordered to Cashtown, after having occupied Carlisle for three and a half days, he and Rodes high-tailed it southward through Holly Gap.

Ewell, having served a tour of duty at the "old" Army's Carlisle Barracks, was familiar enough with the country to know the most direct route to use in order to get over to Adams County. But, unfortunately, he had lost a leg earlier in the war forcing him to travel in a carriage, generally situated somewhere in the center of his marching column.

The leader of his cavalry detachment, Albert Jenkins, was new to this neck of the woods. So when Jenkins arrived at the fork of the road at the Upper Mill in Papertown (Mt. Holly Springs) during the early morning hours, he rode directly up over the mountain on the road to Hanover.

When Ewell arrived at the fork, he discovered Jenkins' error but was quick to realize that so much of the column had passed that it would be time-consuming to have them backtrack. He therefore sent word on ahead to Jenkins to turn at Petersburg, continue southward on the Harrisburg-Gettysburg Road to Heidlersburg where another right turn would put them on the road to Cashtown.

On the night of June 30 while bivouacing near Heidlersburg, Ewell and Rodes met Early's division returning from the vicinity of York. The meeting was quite accidental.

In mid-morning July 1, Rodes heard cannon booming as he arrived at Middletown (Biglerville) so he turned left on the Newville Road, arriving on Oak Ridge near Gettysburg at 1 p.m., in time to be of much help to the Rebs during their afternoon's engagement. Incidentally, Rodes used a measured road distance of 38.5 miles in getting from Carlisle to the field of action.

With audible evidence that the battle had been joined at Gettysburg instead of Cashtown, Ewell sent Early in toward Gettysburg on the Harrisburg Road where he arrived in time to put the coup de grace to the Federals fighting on the north of the town.

Thus the mix-up at Papertown worked to the advantage of the Rebels.

Unfortunately for the Rebs, the same did not hold true of Johnson's outfit. Allegheny (so-called to distinguish him from the multitudinous other Johnsons serving the States Righters) had camped since Saturday, June 27, three miles west of Carlisle along the Shippensburg Pike (now Ritner Highway) near McAllister Church. With his wagons strung out along the pike, the tail end of his command was a scant five miles from Shippensburg.

At about this time, Gen. Robert E. Lee got into the act, ordering Allegheny to Cashtown without taking the trouble to inform Ewell immediately about what was being done.

Johnson backtracked to Green Park where he turned left, passing through Scotland and reaching the Gettysburg-Chambersburg Pike at Greenwood (Caledonia), covering 59 miles of roadway getting to Gettysburg where he did not arrive until 9 p.m. July 1, much too late to be of any use

to the Secessionists on the first day.

In addition to the circuity of the route, the slow moving wagons so jammed the Chambersburg Pike that Longstreet's Corps had to be sidetracked, delaying their arrival on the field until the morning of July 2.

It can be fairly said that the beginning of the "Longstreet controversy," a hassle perpetuated by the Southerners as to why they didn't win at Gettysburg, started around Carlisle.

The bombardment of Carlisle on July 1 brings up some interesting questions. How many cannon? Where were they located? How many shots were actually fired?

According to W. W. Blackford, Stuart's engineering chief, James Ewell Brown Stuart's vaunted cavalry outfit consisted of 2,000 men and boys, broken up into three brigades accompanied by three four-gun batteries of horses and artillery—12 cannon in all.

Jeb—the nickname is derived from his initials—had been operating behind enemy lines tearing up railroad tracks, cutting telegraph wires and raising hob in general. He had captured a 120-wagon Federal supply train at Rockville, Md., and insisted on toting it along to be delivered to Robert E. Lee—in person.

The prize seriously fouled up the cavalry's movement for not only was Stuart's speed geared to that of the most cussed, lop-eared, wagon-drawing mule, but the train had to be guarded—fore, aft and on both sides.

Thus on July 1 at 7 p.m., the 945-man brigade under Fitzhugh Lee (Robert E's. nephew), being the lead outfit for that day, appeared east of Carlisle along the York Road.

Jeb himself stopped near Brandtsville with Chambliss' crew and wagons between there and Dillsburg while Wade Hampton was east of Dillsburg on the Dover Road.

Accompanying Fitzhugh Lee was a four rifled-cannon battery commanded by a 24-year-old physician, James Breathed.

A rifled gun could hurl an elongated projectile approximately one and a quarter miles. The ammunition was semi-fixed, meaning that the powderbag was separate from the projectile. This fact caused the butternut gunners untold pain and suffering during their trip to Carlisle. While fording the Potomac River, they found it so deep as to completely submerge the caissons and limbers. Therefore, each powder bag had to be individually ferried across by horsemen holding the bags high overhead.

As each gun's limber carried 100 rounds and its caisson 200, it required many dunkings for both men and beasts in order to keep the powder dry.

Horse artillery's missiles consisted of three types, solid bolts, explosive shell (shrapnel), and cannister (a long tin can filled with 49 iron balls, .96 caliber). As the cannister burst, the ball scattered and was most effective in discouraging the opposition's proposed cavalry charge. This stuff could also pock-mark a building profusely.

As Fitzhugh Lee's tired troopers—they had been in the saddle for nine days—spread out in a skirmish line along the LeTort, from South to North streets, Breathed placed his four pop-guns on a slight knoll on the south side of the York Road, near Ashland Cemetery.

Some authorities place these guns on the heights along the Petersburg Road. Marking off on a map the known buildings struck in town and scaling 1,910 yards backward from the furthest target places the cannon somewhere in the cemetery's vicinity.

Civil War gunners always headed for a hill when looking for a platform from which to shoot. Since Breathed was aiming high—the bombardment was strictly for morale-breaking purposes — the Petersburg Road location is just

too far out when it is considered that several buildings of Dickinson College were hit (Old South and East).

This brings up the question of how many rounds were fired.

W. F. Smith says in his official report that there were 134. But then Smith also says Fitzhugh had 3,300 troops and seven guns and that they came from the direction of Mechanicsburg, that shells were thrown up Railroad Street.

Without wishing to sound presumptuous, I can't help but feel that Baldy Smith was a much better fighter than a report writer, official or otherwise.

Surely, no one actually counted the explosions during those hectic few hours. It does seem probable that the Southerners would conserve their ammunition when operating deep in enemy territory and expecting to fight a major engagement at almost any time.

The only ammunition they had was with them. And they had no means of replenishing it.

Their artillery had been brought into play four times during their journey toward Carlisle, once in Virginia, twice in Maryland, and during the battle of Hanover. So the chests were not full.

This coupled with the fact that the gunners had to tote their powder across the Potomac seems to point toward a miserly use of the stuff—not to be wasted on unimportant targets.

One explosive shell or round of canister can leave many marks on buildings. This means that if actual marks were subsequently counted, 134 might be correct but this does not necessarily mean that that many shells were fired.

Just to prove that this is all very speculative, Breathed's crew ran out of ammunition in the cavalry fight at Gettysburg on July 3, just when it was most needed.

It therefore follows that "you pays your money and takes your choice." My guess is not more than 80.

The accompanying republication (for the first time since the Civil War) of The Carlisle American for August 5, 1863, invites some reconsideration of the bombardment, although the newly found testimony introduces as much confusion as clarification. It was hard enough already to locate the battery emplacement, identify the command, ascertain the type of gun and ammunition, and account for the expenditure of shells. Now we have a witness who picks up shells from a Whitworth rifled cannon, a weapon no one had dreamed of associating with Breathed's battery or with Carlisle.

The article by Professor S. D. Hillman entitled "A Few Days of Rebel Rule" states in the paragraph describing the number and size of the cannon used by the Confederates in shelling Carlisle on the night of July 1st:—"they used six pieces—firing a double conical, elongated, "twisted," shell—about 9 inches long, weighing 8 pounds—which will carry from 4 to 5 miles."

He refers to these projectiles as "rifle bolts"—fired from English Whitworth 3-inch guns.

Hillman claims to have picked up two such "bolts" (one on the college grounds and the other from the roof of the Episcopal church.)

His description of a Whitworth bolt is most accurate. However, the finding of these projectiles in Carlisle is contrary to all the information, thus far uncovered.

According to the authorities (Tilberg's "Gettysburg"; Downey's "The Guns at Gettysburg; "The Long Arm of Lee'—J. C. Wise; and the National Military Park's field markers) the South had but two Whitworths at Gettysburg, both breech-loading 2.75 cal., firing a 12 pound bolt. (Replicas of these guns may be seen near the Peace Light monument.)

Blackford's "War Years With Jeb Stuart" says, "Stuart took with him (on the Gettysburg campaign) three brigades of cavalry—2,000 men and 12 cannon."

Burke Davis' "Jeb Stuart the Last Cavalier" informs us; "after

the 120 Union wagons were captured at Rockville, Md.—the train had to be guarded on all sides—the guns being divided equally between the three brigades". (This would allow Fitz Lee's outfit to have 4 cannon).

The battlefield marker out on Cavalry Field says: "James Breathed Battery of Horse Artillery, attached to Fitzhugh Lee's brigade, four 3 inch rifles, arrived on the East Cavalry field at 2 p.m.. An ample supply of ammunition had been received in the morning of the third on the way to the field. Ammunition exhausted in the fight. 6 killed—8 wounded—10 horses killed".

Referring to "Arms & Equipment of the Civil War" (Coggins) we find that a 12 pdr. Whitworth breechloader weighed 1092 pounds. This is fairly heavy for the fast marches required of horse artillery—the 820 pound weight of a 3 inch rifle being much preferred.

In consulting "Notes of Ordnance of the American Civil War" (Peterson) we find that Whitworth also made a 6 pounder (2.15 cal.), the projectile weighing 6 pounds and the range being 1⅝ miles. The tube of this gun weighed 700 pounds, and this gun was a muzzle loader.

The Whitworths were used mainly by the Rebs—being brought in through the Yankie blockade. The Federals had a few in the Washington defences—but frowned on their general use due to the scarcity of shells.

A "bolt" was cast in sort of a twist (in order to take the rifling, which gave it better accuracy and longer range). Because of this twist there wasn't much room for a bursting charge (the favorite of the cavalry being cannister or an explosive shell). Therefore most of these bolts were solid.

There is a possibility that Breathed had just such a 6-pound Whitworth; otherwise its impossible to explain Hillman's possession of the two projectiles.

The artillery authorities could have overlooked this fact—concentrating only on the breechloaders at Gettysburg.

It's a bit puzzling to account for the difference in caliber—for you certainly can't shoot a 3-inch shell from a 2.15 bore. Then too, the 6 pound weight isn't easily reconcilable with Hillman's 8 pounds.

It is extremely doubtful whether a "bolt" could have been fired from a 3 inch gun. However, in that war artillerists were known to shoot anything that might be handy (necessity being the mother of invention).

We have no other recourse in the face of the professor's findings but to concede that possibly the Rebs did have a 6-pound Whitworth which was somehow overlooked, as the experts reconstructed the war, many years after the fact. If this be the case, the gun could have been fired from the high ground along the Petersburg road.

However this still leaves the three remaining 3-inch rifles to be accounted for. As these guns had an extreme range of only 1⅛ miles I would still be correct on my cemetery location.

It is things like this that make the study of the war so fascinating. I must reiterate my original statement that "you pays your money and takes your choice."