



*Two of the 14 Confederate cannons instrumental in stopping a massive Union cavalry charge had VMI cadets at the helm, in combat for the first time. Smoke from the Bushong Farm fighting clouds the horizon. George S. Patton's 22nd Virginia is seen along the stone wall at center. (Painting by Keith Rocco)*

## **THE BATTLE OF NEW MARKET AND ITS VMI CADETS: THE FORGOTTEN ONES**

**VMI cadets working cannons rose to the occasion, paving the way for a startling Confederate victory in May 1864.**

By Chris Howland, HistoryNet 7/14/2022

**For any shortcomings** Union Maj. Gen. Julius Stahel may have had as an officer, his courage, at least, seemed beyond reproach. A native of Hungary, Stahel had served with the U.S. Army since the war's outset, helping form its first German American regiment—the 8th New York Infantry—and then seeing action in the First Bull Run Campaign. Despite the Union setback at Cross Keys during Stonewall Jackson's celebrated 1862 Shenandoah Valley Campaign, Stahel received regard as “brave and enthusiastic...seen during the day in the thickest of the fight, encouraging and urging on his men.” Further commendation would come in August for his efforts with the Army of Virginia at Second Bull Run—yet

another Federal defeat in that calamitous second year of the war.

On May 15, 1864, the 38-year-old commander found himself engaged at the important Shenandoah Valley crossroads town of New Market. Serving as cavalry commander of Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel's Department of West Virginia, Stahel was being counted on to play a prominent part in Ulysses S. Grant's three-pronged conquest against Richmond that spring. As Grant's Overland Campaign pushed through central Virginia toward the Confederate capital and Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler advanced up the Peninsula from Norfolk, it was the task of Sigel's army to further disrupt the Rebel defenses and keep resources and reinforcements away from Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.



*Julius Stahel, who resided in Prussia and England after fleeing Hungary, arrived in New York in 1859 and began working at a German-language newspaper. Early in the war, he commanded cavalry in John Frémont's Mountain Department and John Pope's Army of Virginia. (Library of Congress)*

Though relatively small in scale, the Battle of New Market was signature in many ways. Most famous were the contributions of the Virginia Military Institute's Corps of Cadets, called into the fray out of desperation by Maj. Gen. John C. Breckinridge and ultimately playing a role in a stunning Confederate triumph. For Breckinridge, New Market would be a particularly welcome success, coming in the wake of hard-luck Western Theater setbacks earlier in the war at battles such as Stones River and Chattanooga. Breckinridge handled his force adroitly against Sigel's vast army, nearly twice the size as his.

There were Union heroes, too: Medal of Honor recipient James M. Burns of the 1st West Virginia; Captain Henry A. du Pont, Battery B, 5th U.S. Artillery; Colonel Jacob Campbell, Lieutenant George Gageby, and Captain Edwin J. Geissinger of the 54th Pennsylvania—to name just a few.

What remains uncertain is how exactly Sigel allowed what probably should have been a comfortable victory get away from him. The incessant rain and stormy weather in which the armies clashed figured as major culprits, of course, as did Sigel's seeming command complacency and lack of urgency in reaching New Market ahead of the Confederates. Breckinridge's ability to do so allowed him to dictate critical aspects of the pending showdown.

Often overlooked in assessing the battle, however, is Stahel's mindset on May 15 and how greatly it impacted the result. Early in the afternoon, even with the action unsettled and the weather worsening, Sigel's significant advantage in numbers still offered promise of a Federal victory. Yet Stahel, his cavalry aligned a few miles

behind the Union left flank on the Valley Turnpike, was growing increasingly restless. Not known as a bystander, the Hungarian finally decided that action was needed and ordered an ill-advised, full-blown charge. The domino effect from that would cost Sigel's army dearly.

**Cavalry had yet to be a major factor.** Earlier in the day, Confederate Colonel John Imboden's troopers had moved east of Smith's Creek along with McClanahan's Battery to enfilade the Union flank. Fire from McClanahan's guns forced the withdrawal of Union cavalry and Alfred von Kleiser's battery, but when Imboden later attempted to cross back across the creek to get behind the Federals, the swollen waters proved too great an obstacle.

"It was raining hard for the last hour, the ground was soaked, we were on low ground and there were puddles of water everywhere about us..." grumbled Jacob Lester of the 1st New York Veteran Cavalry, adding that he and his comrades soon "got orders to 'draw sabre' and I knew we were to charge....Horses got stuck in the mud and fell over each other and in a moment we were mired up like a flock of sheep."

The order from Stahel was in response to an apparent advance on his right by Confederate Brig. Gen. John Echols' Brigade and the dismounted 62nd Virginia Mounted Infantry. As Sarah Kay Bierle posits in *Call Out the Cadets*: "Stahel decided the cavalry had been inactive enough for one day and concocted a grand scheme fit for a Napoleonic battlefield, but which would not translate well on the Valley Pike."

Stahel, who had first gained notice fighting during the Hungarian Revolution of 1848-49,

had long studied and admired such Napoleonic tactics, but the general clearly misjudged in believing an all-out charge on this terrain and under these conditions would succeed. In addition to the mud, a ravine with broken ground lay ahead of the Federal horsemen, and the Valley Pike (modern-day Route 11) featured low stone walls that would funnel them into a compressed front and leave them easy Confederate targets.

It is possible Stahel had no idea how great a threat he faced; even then, it might not have been enough to make him reconsider. The rain and low-lying battlefield smoke greatly hindered visibility, and Breckinridge—deducing a likely charge—had aligned his men perfectly. The Confederate position was formed into a defensive “V”: three batteries in the center, the 22nd Virginia Infantry on the left, and the 23rd Virginia Battalion on the right. (Jackson’s Battery was just west of the pike, positioned behind the 62nd Virginia.)

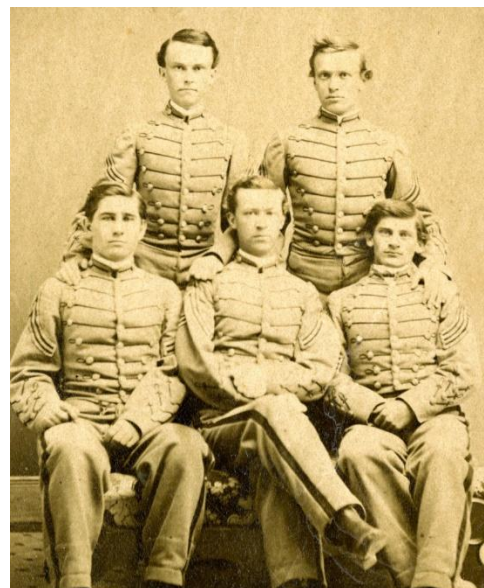
Included in the assembly of cannons on so-called Battery Heights were two guns manned by VMI cadets, lined up behind a partially demolished rock fence. Under the command of Lieutenant Collier H. Minge, a fellow cadet, they would be the first from the institute to see combat and would not disappoint, handling their guns like seasoned professionals. “We got quickly into action with canister...,” Minge recalled. “When the smoke cleared away the cavalry seemed to have been completely broken up.”

The collective Confederate firepower brought a quick end to Stahel’s brazen charge. Stahel had sent forth roughly 1,000 horses, but the lead elements never got close to the Confederate guns, cut down en masse in the middle of the road. As Rand Noyes of

the 22nd Virginia later wrote: “Only one man on an unmanageable horse came through...” The 1st New York rallied for a second attempt but was quickly undone by friendly fire.

“They were ready for us,” lamented Sergeant William A. McIlhenny of the 1st Maryland (U.S.) Potomac Home Brigade, also known as Cole’s Cavalry. “Our battalion marched directly into their artillery fire. Shells were dropping all around us and musket balls were whistling. The rebels were so close that we could see their long grey line of infantrymen advancing. Where were our regiments of infantry?”

“The rebel infantry was nearing gunshot range. Just as they started firing a regiment of our men arrived. We fell back for them to form in line. But it was too late! The rebels were upon us, firing at close range. They mowed our men down like grass. Our cavalry tried to keep together, but were impeded by the retreating infantry men escaping from the hot fire of Breckenridge’s pursuing men. Many of them didn’t escape. All the way to the Shenandoah River they were hot on our heels.”



*The VMI cadets pictured here, members of the Class of 1867, all fought at the Battle of New Market. Bottom row, from left: Edward M. Tutwiler, John L. Tunstall, and Thomas G. Hayes. Top row, from left: Hardaway H. Dinwiddie and Gaylord B. Clark. (Virginia Military Institute archives)*

Recalled Lester: “A shell from the rebel artillery struck a man at my side carrying away half of his head and spattering his brains, hair and whiskers all over the right side of me. The same shell carried away the left shoulder and arm of a man in front of me and struck another man farther on square in the back, passed through and as he toppled from his horse I saw his whole front torn open and a torrent of blood flowing from it.”

In a June 1908 letter to Confederate Colonel George M. Edgar, Minge reminisced about the remarkable history his cadets had made:

*“[W]e were hurried down to position No. 3 on the right and just off the turn-pike road....Here we got quickly into action with cannister against Cavalry charging down the road and adjacent fields. I think all the guns [Major William] McLaughlin had were thrown down to this point. I believe the Artillery aided the Infantry very materially against this last bold move of the enemy. When the smoke cleared away the Cavalry seemed to have been completely broken up, and we saw no more of them to the close....*

*“I have heard that the conduct of the boys composing the Section was commended both by Gen. Breckinridge and the Major. Dear Old Col. [William Henry] Gilham said some nice things about us, but his love for us would have overlooked our faults if we had committed any. Major Thomas M. Semmes of the Institute...was charged with the responsibility of seeing that we did not run*

*away, and I have been told that he also had some very kind words for us.”*



*Collier H. Minge, an 1864 VMI graduate, later worked in the cotton trade in New Orleans. “I was put in command,” he wrote, “no doubt...to my being the then senior Captain of the Corps.” (Virginia Military Institute Archives)*

**McIlhenny had questioned the absence of** Union infantry support during the failed cavalry attack. As it turned out, the 54th Pennsylvania Infantry was nearby, positioned next to the Valley Pike on terrain Minge referred to in his letter as a “dale”—featuring rolling hills and a group of low cedar trees. Aligned to the 54th’s immediate right was the 1st West Virginia Infantry, which in turn was flanked by the 34th Massachusetts Infantry. The dreadful conditions and battle chaos, however, created uncertainty for all three of those regiments, and uncoordinated advances starting after 3 p.m. would turn particularly dire for the 54th Pennsylvania.

Earlier in the war, the 54th had seen duty primarily in defense of a stretch of the B&O Railroad between Cumberland, Md., and what would become Martinsburg, W.Va. New Market would be one of the regiment's first true engagements and it would hit the Keystone State boys hard. In approximately two hours of fighting, the 54th suffered 174 casualties—nearly 31 percent of its 566-man strength. To their credit, the Pennsylvanians remained engaged for some time before being forced to retreat from the field.

At one point, Sigel's Union lines had stretched roughly more than a mile west from Smith's Creek to the North Fork Shenandoah River, just north of Jacob Bushong's prosperous farmstead. The fighting had progressed west following Stahel's failed charge and the 54th Pennsylvania's struggle on ground to be labeled "The Bloody Cedars." A Federal position on a rise next to the river, however, remained relatively strong, manned by the artillery units of Captains Alonzo Snow, John Carlin, and Alfred von Kleiser as well as elements of the 34th Massachusetts and 1st West Virginia.

Sigel wanted the 54th Pennsylvania, 1st West Virginia, and 34th Massachusetts to advance in junction. That would not happen. The 1st covered about 100 yards before falling back, leaving the 54th and 34th isolated on its flanks.

When a gap opened in the Confederate line around the Bushong Farm, fear grew that the Federals would exploit it. To this point, Breckinridge had held the cadets in reserve, reluctant to send them in. Urged on by an aide, Major Charles Semple, he finally relented: "Put the boys in, and may God forgive me for the order."



The VMI cadets begin their advance across the so-called "Field of Lost Shoes" north of the Bushong Farm, captured in a Don Troiani painting. Note the dead Federal below the tree, likely a 34th Massachusetts soldier. (Troiani, Don (b.1949)/Bridgeman Images)

The cadets' advance down an incline toward the Bushong House began ominously, as a Federal shell exploded in their midst, killing three: William Cabell, Charles Crockett, and Henry Jones. Fears that the cadets might run were promptly put to rest, though, even after another cadet, William McDowell, was shot and killed and several others were wounded.

The VMI boys joined the line of Brig. Gen. Gabriel C. Wharton's Brigade around the Bushong Farm. Their position was receiving steady fire from von Kleiser's batteries as well as the 34th Massachusetts and 1st West Virginia.

A stealth advance along the river by members of the 51st Virginia and the trailing 26th Virginia put Snow's and Carlin's guns in jeopardy, however, and fire from the Confederate right produced significant Federal casualties.

The 300 or so yards of elevated ground that directly separated the cadets and von Kleiser's guns were caked with ankle-deep mud—no deterrent in the least, it would prove. Their bayonets fixed, the cadets

suddenly surged forward. Even when several lost their shoes in the muck and were forced to proceed barefoot, the momentum was unstoppable.

Likewise impeded by the muddy terrain, von Kleiser's uneasy men struggled to shift back the battery's six guns. When the relentless cadets overran his position, von Kleiser would lose one of his guns. He then was forced to abandon a second, its wheels mired in the mud.

The Union position atop the ridge collapsed and the fraught Federals retreated toward Mount Jackson, eventually crossing the North Fork of the Shenandoah and burning the lone bridge there to stop short the pursuing Confederates. It had been a spectacular, well-deserved victory, but for the triumphant Confederates, it would only delay the inevitable.

**A few days later**, Grant removed Sigel from command. In June, Sigel's replacement, Maj. Gen. David Hunter, torched the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington before advancing toward Lynchburg. Stahel continued as commander of the department's cavalry, and his efforts at the Battle of Piedmont on June 5 earned him a wound and a Medal of Honor. He resigned from the Army in February 1865.

Union Maj. Gen. Phil Sheridan eventually assumed command of what became the Army of the Shenandoah and unleashed a campaign of devastation upon the region's bountiful agricultural resources—"The Burning," as it was infamously known in Southern hearts. Sheridan's victory at Cedar Creek on October 19, 1864, marked the effective end of any Confederate military hopes in this once-critical theater of war.

*Chris Howland is editor of America's Civil War.*

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*With fixed bayonets, 54th Massachusetts soldiers ascend the ramparts at Fort Wagner. "Don't fire a musket on the way up, but go in and bayonet them at their guns," they were instructed. Well-positioned and well-armed Confederates made sure many of them never got the chance. (Attack on Battery Wagner - 1863, 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regulars under Colonel Robert G. Shaw/Tom Lovell/Courtesy of Heritage Auctions, Dallas)*

## **A NEW FIRSTHAND ACCOUNT OF THE 54TH'S ASSAULT ON FORT WAGNER**

**Capt. John W.M. Appleton's account provides a new look at the regiment's famed assault.**

By James Robbins Jewell & Eugene S. Van Sickle, HistoryNet 7/18/2022

**As the 54th Massachusetts** waited below Fort Wagner, Capt. John W.M. Appleton distracted himself from the anxiety of approaching battle by writing a letter to his wife, Mary. It was not long, however, before his focus shifted from relating recent events to telling her what was about to happen: "We are in the extreme advance against Fort

Wagner, shot is singing over us from the Rebel guns. My company & William's & Pope's & Grace's in advance." Betraying his sense of imminent danger, he wrote one last line before turning his full attention to the Confederate position, telling his wife, "[W]e will meet in heaven if not on Earth, kiss [our two-year-old daughter] Mabel."

Although the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, one of the Union's earliest Black regiments, had fought a spirited skirmish two days earlier, many believed leading the assault on Fort Wagner was the true test to answer the question if enlisting African Americans to fight for their freedom would work. Appleton hoped that his superiors would "let us fight on until slavery is impossible." Leading the attack against one of the key earthen Confederate forts protecting Charleston, South Carolina, might quiet most of the critics and settle the issue for good. This was the opportunity for which the regiment and its commander, Col. Robert Gould Shaw, had been lobbying for some time now.



*The ill effects of sunstroke forced Appleton, a major at the time, to resign from the 54th*

*in late 1864. (Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society)*

Like the 54th's other hand-picked company commanders, Appleton came from Massachusetts. Although he attended Harvard Medical School in the early 1850s, he did not complete his training and was working as a clerk when the war started. Unlike his future commander, Shaw, Appleton had not immediately joined one of the regiments that headed south to fight. His prewar service was as a private in the Corps of Cadets, Massachusetts Militia in the months prior to joining the 54th. Appleton served with the unit performing guard duty in and around Boston before it was federalized in May 1862 and sent to garrison Fort Warren in Boston Harbor. The unit was mustered out two months later, leaving Appleton searching for another command with which to serve. Although there were numerous opportunities, Appleton decided that "if the Government ever allowed the colored man an opportunity to fight for their liberty," he preferred to serve in such a regiment. The time came in the late fall of 1862, before the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect Jan. 1, 1863. Ten days later, on January 11, Appleton wrote to Col. Thomas W. Higginson, who had been appointed the commanding officer of the 1st South Carolina (Union) Infantry in November 1862 and was in the process of recruiting his regiment, which was made up of escaped slaves from South Carolina and Georgia. Appleton wrote Higginson, "I am desirous of serving our country in connection with the colored troops now being raised."

THE 54TH

Although the eager Appleton did not get the captain's commission he sought from Colonel Higginson, his opportunity came three weeks later when Massachusetts Gov. John Andrew authorized the formation of a new infantry regiment of African American soldiers, to be named the 54th Massachusetts Infantry. Appleton was initially commissioned a second lieutenant, one of the all-white officers in the embryonic regiment, in February 1863 and sent out on recruiting duty.

After three months of training at Camp Meigs, near Boston, the regiment was ordered to South Carolina in late May — finally, as one officer noted, “en route for rebellious soil.” Initially the 54th was placed under the command of Colonel James Montgomery, who ordered his two regiments to keep busy looking for guerrilla forces while executing total war on the local populace, destroying crops and burning any building he felt could be used for the Confederate cause, including private homes.



*The offer of \$13-a-month pay on this recruiting poster became a source of contention for Black*

*men of the 54th when the federal government arbitrarily altered the rate to \$10 a month. (Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society)*

Hating the work Montgomery assigned his men and desperate for his regiment to see combat, Colonel Shaw was able to get his command transferred to Brig. Gen. George C. Strong's brigade. Action would shortly follow, as Union forces continued their efforts to knock out or capture Confederate installations protecting Charleston Harbor, which included masonry forts like Forts Sumter and Moultrie, and earthen installations such as Forts Wagner and Gregg (which the Confederates instead called “batteries”).

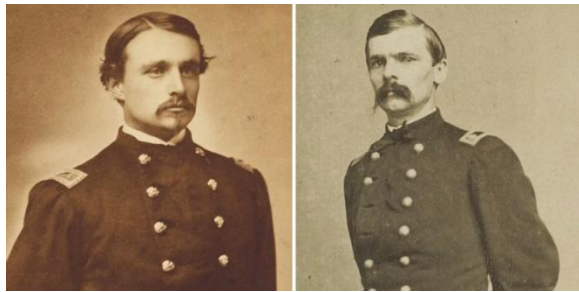
On July 16, the regiment finally engaged in combat operations, no less to save a white regiment — the 10th Connecticut Infantry — from possibly being cut off during a heavy skirmish at Grimball's Landing on James Island. The 54th Massachusetts suffered more than 40 casualties in its baptismal combat.

The ferocity of the fighting at Grimball's Landing was only a precursor for what followed two days later when the 54th led the twilight attack against Fort Wagner. Union troops were pulled off the island for a short rest, without camp equipment or food, the next day. The lack of food and quality sleep did not prevent Strong's brigade, with the 54th Massachusetts in front, from being ordered to attack Fort Wagner, on Morris Island, on July 18.

Though still tired from the fighting on the 16th and hungry, the men in the regiment understood the significance of leading the attack on the fort. The assault, scheduled to start at 7:30 p.m., had to be launched on a



narrow front, hemmed in by the Atlantic Ocean on the right and marshes from Vincent's Creek on the left. The heavy daylight bombardment preceding the attack failed to do much damage to Brig. Gen. William B. Taliaferro's Confederates waiting inside the fort. Unable to attack across a wider front, and with only one viable approach, Strong's brigade as a whole — and especially the 54th Massachusetts — had only a forlorn hope. Even if they could breach the fort, it was unlikely the rest of the supporting commands could come to their aid. Still, this was what Shaw had asked for, and what the others like Appleton wanted: the chance to prove the fighting capabilities of their African American soldiers.



*Union Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and Brig. Gen. George C. Strong, who commanded the lead brigade in Truman Seymour's 2nd Division. Strong was mortally wounded by shellfire, dying July 30. (Heritage Auctions, Dallas; Library of Congress)*

As Strong's brigade assembled for the attack, Shaw organized his regiment into two assault columns. He led the first battalion while his second in command, Lt. Col. Norwood Hallowell, led the second. As they anxiously awaited the order to attack, 19-year-old Capt. Luis Emilio remembered how "[o]fficers had silently grasped one another's hands, brought their revolvers to the front, tightened their sword-belts. The men whispered last injunctions to comrades, and listened" for the command to begin the

attack, first at quick time, then when 100 yards from the fort, at the double-quick. Capt. Appleton would finally have the chance to "drive my boys hard" in battle, during which he hoped "to climb the exterior slope of a Rebel battery, especially if a white Regiment attacks near us."

His account below begins as the regiment waited to launch the attack on Fort Wagner. Before it was over, Appleton was among the more than 40 percent of the regiment's men who became casualties, including 14 of 22 officers.

### TALK OF TRIFLES

We sat down on the sand to wait our orders, near me Surgeon [Lincoln R.] Stone had some stretchers. As we sat there we talked of trifles, and every body seemed perfectly cool and calm. After a while, we were ordered forward and commenced our march up the sandy road, in the middle of the island[.] We passed the light house blown up by the Rebels, and earthworks taken from them, and after passing the sand hills came out on a more level expanse of sand, near the old Beacon house.

Before us, we could still see Fort Sumter looming up, nearer, on the island were earthworks, and Ft. Wagner. as soon as we were perceived by the Rebels they commenced firing solid shot at us, apparently 32-pounders, they struck in front of us and ricocheted over us. We were marching by the flank right in front, that is in column of four men abreast, Co. B in front and my Company A behind them. We moved forward under this harmless fire, until we reached our batteries, which were playing on Wagner, and turning to the right passed round them onto the beach. Just as we did so a shell from the enemy exploded

at one of the guns and over the smoke I saw a man's cap fly high in the air. After passing well in front of the batteries, we were formed in line by wing that is, half the regiment in the front line, and the other half in line behind them. Our arms were loaded, but by order no [percussion] caps were put on the guns. We were then ordered to lie down. Before us, the Island narrowed to a strip of sand with the harbor of Charleston on our right and an inlet on our left. The first line or wing was under immediate command of the Colonel, the second one under charge of Major [Edward N. "Ned"'] Hallowell.



*Clockwise from top left: Sergeant Henry Steward, from Michigan, was part of a large portion of free, non-Massachusetts soldiers in the 54th (he survived Wagner but died in September 1863); Sergeant James W. Bush; Private Richard Gomar, Co. H; and Private Charles Smith, Co. C. (Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society)*

The line officers were all in their places, in the rear of their companies, mostly lying down with their men. Some however moved about a little and talked in low tones with each other.

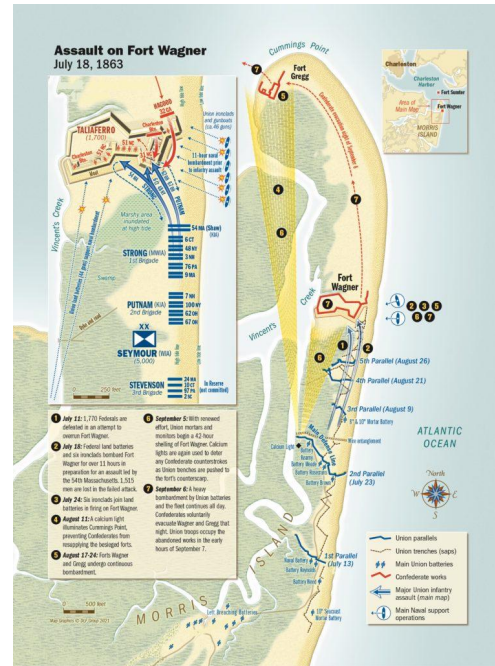
We told each other where our letters were in our pockets and asked that they be sent home in case we did not arise out of the fight. Gen. Strong came in front of the Regiment, and addressed the men, telling them that he was a Massachusetts man and that he knew they would uphold the honor of the old [Bay] State. He was a noble figure, and his words were applauded by the men. I think we all loved him at first sight. As the cannon shot flew over us he said[,] "boys don't mind them, they have been firing at me all day and could not hit me."

He asked who was the color sergeant, and then asked who would pick up the flag, and carry it on in case he should be hit or fail. Several voices answered "I." Colonel Shaw who stood near him took his cigar from his lips and said quietly "I will." Gen. Strong said he was sorry that we must go in to the fight tired, and hungry, as we were, but the enemy were tired and hungry too, as they had been under heavy fire all day. "Don't fire a musket on the way up, but go in and bayonet them at their guns." Our little Colonel to outward appearance as calm as ever, walked slowly up and down in front of the lines.

I believe he [Shaw] told Ned Hallowell, our Major, that he thought he would not come out of the fight, but would be contented if he could have lived a little longer with his wife. Certain he had married just before we left the State. No one from his appearance could have told that a single apprehension of danger to himself was in his thoughts. When he came over to our end of the line, he once stood and looked fixedly on me, I was the only officer standing up at the time, it seemed as if he was about to speak, but he did not. He wore a round jacket, with silver eagles pinned 'on his shoulders, a cap and

his short stature and fair hair and face beardless, except for a moustache, made him look very boyish.

Wilkie James [Lieutenant Garth Wilkinson James], our adjutant, came up to me and said “we have the most magnificent chance to prove the valor of the colored race now,” and as he spoke accidentally discharged his revolver. The colonel looked round on us and Wilkie said, “I would not have had that happen for anything.” Soon the declining day brought the early darkness, and the word came to rise, and [move] forward. We moved at quick time, with fixed bayonets. All this time the guns of the fleet and shore batteries had been thundering away “Prove yourselves men,” said the Colonel, as we started. Our lines were about sixteen hundred yards from the fort. As we advanced, fire was opened upon us, the strip of land over which we charged was varying in width, now we had plenty of room, and now our lines were crowded together by the water on either side. Besides, the fire of Wagner, Fort Johnson, and the batteries on James Island, Cummings Point, Sumter, Moultrie, and Sullivans Islands batteries played on us. The men was to move at quick time to within one hundred yards of the Fort and then charge at a double. We came to a line of shattered palisades, how we passed them we can hardly tell. Then we passed over some rifle pits and I can dimly remember seeing some men in them, over whom we ran.



(Map by DLF Group)

The fire became terrible shell, canister, and musket balls tore through us. [Capt. Edward L.] Jones’ Co [D], in the second line, which was behind, closed up on us in their excitement, and Willie [Lieutenant William H. Homans] was busy beating them back. The terrible roar deafened us, as we pressed on, at last, we reached the moat of the fort. The sky had become black with clouds, and the thunder cracked and lightning flashed. As we reached the ditch some one gave an order “by the right flank, and Co B on my right, apparently filed off that way. My company preserved its alignment and the two cannonades in the bastions on that instant were fired, the one on the right, tearing the right of the company to precise killing Sergeant [Andrew] Benton, and others, and about at the same instant a like disaster fell upon the left of the company from the bastion on our left. I could hear the rattle of the balls on the men & arms. I was in front of the company and leaped down

into the water, followed by all the men left standing.

On my left the Colonel with the colors, and the men of the companies on the left, waded across abreast with me, we reached the base of the curtain and climbed up the parapet. Our second battalion right with us. On the top of the works, we met the Rebels, and by the flashes of their guns we looked down into the fort. Apparently a sea of bayonets, some eight or ten feet below us. The Colonel planted the colors on the traverse next the service magazine on the left of the curtain, and the fighting was now about them. In my immediate front the enemy were very brave and met us eagerly. Bayonets, musket butts, revolvers and swords and musket shots, were all used, but our small number and our disadvantage in being up against the sky told heavily.

The men rapidly turning out around me. I received a sword thrust through my blouse but it fortunately passed between my legs. About this time, I saw our colors fall, rise again and go back through the water of the ditch borne by some one. Finding it impossible to hold the crest of the parapet, we were so near the enemy as to be able almost to touch them, and they were able to use cannon rammers, and hand spikes in the melee. We withdrew our diminished numbers to the outer slope of the parapet, hoping to hold in until our second brigade came up, and continued the fight as best we could. On the left bastion the enemy rallied and opened an enfilading fire with muskets upon us. Not one man stood on the parapet when I left it. All down the exterior slope, as well as on the top, lay the bodies of our men and behind us in the water of the moat, the poor fellows bodies lay like stepping stones. If we cannot take the fort unaided, our duty

is to hold what little we have gained until the attack of the Brigade behind us, and to keep if possible the enemy from firing their cannon upon our advancing troops. To that task we bent our energies. Capts. [George] Pope and Jones, and Lieut[ant Edward B.] Emerson, who had just been assigned to my company, and myself with a crowd of our men of all companies perhaps fifty in number now commenced firing at every rebel who showed himself. We picked up the muskets of the fallen but found many ineffective from being filled with sand. The coolness and bravery of these officers and men was very marked.

#### TROUBLESOME ENEMY

The enemy were particularly troublesome from their bastion on our left. One man in particular with a broad brimmed hat hit some one of our men every time he fired. I ordered a Sergt to pick him off, but he could not, so Capt Pope and I, fired at him at the same time when he next showed himself, and he disappeared, and we saw no more of him. A wounded soldier of my company lay with his back against the fort, his broken arm across his body, he was taking cartridges from his box tearing them and laying them in his wounded arm, for Lieut. Emerson, who was doing good work with a musket. Emerson was but 17 yrs old and as brave as a little lion, most of our officers were very young, Pope but 19, Poor [Lieutenant] Cabot Russel but 18. etc. One of my men chafing at fighting so on the defensive, despite my order to keep still where he was, said he would go up and kill another one and climbed up to the top of the parapet again, he fired and immediately rolled down right over me, a corpse.

Leaving Pope, Jones, and Emerson, who are doing manful service, I crawl half way into an embrasure in front of the gun, marked S in the place and with my heavy revolver keep the men from firing in. As they get up to prime it they are within a few feet and all in sight when I fire, they disappear. After being there for some time despite their efforts to dislodge me with bayonet, shot, and clubbed muskets. I feel somebody tugging at my legs. So I crawl back and find Geo Wilson of my company, who though shot through both shoulders, will not go the rear without leave. I tell him what I think is the best way to get out, and then find that Pope has fallen, apparently dead, and there are but three officers of the 54th standing and no men. While we hesitate we hear fighting going on in the bastion on our right, and skirting the wall we climb up into it and find a few of the 48th N[ew] York and some other regiments fighting over a traverse, we join them and take part. Just before leaving our old position I found my revolver cylinder would not turn, as it was full of sand. I took it apart[,] cleaned it on my blouse shirt and reloaded.

Where we now were we had a stubborn lot of men to contend against and others were firing on us from the bomb proof. When the enemy laid their muskets on the traverse to fire on us, the muzzles project on our side, and we shoot them hardly an arms length away. I shoot one who catches the sand bags as he falls, thinking he is about to recover, I cock the pistol, and present it again. A grenade bursts and nearly cuts my thumb off, and the pistol twirls around on my fore finger. Just at that moment, Capt. Jones falls heavily against me and before he can answer my question of 'sir are you hurt?' a piece of shell strikes me in the right breast a crushing blow, and lays me beside him. For a moment

the whole dark scene disappears, and I see my wife's face apparently close to me, soon I get my scattered senses to gether, and find that my rubber coat which I had worn in a roll across my right shoulder has been cut nearly in two, that I have a hole in my blouse from which the blood flows, and I cautiously probe the wound in my back with my finger, thinking the missile had gone into my chest. I find that the bones grate and give way under the pressure, but that there is no free hole in the chest, and that it is only some broken ribs. My breath came with great pain but I tried to shoot with my left hand, but the pain was too great and so I laid down again.



*Captain Luis Emilio (center) survived the attack; Ezekiel Tomlinson (left) and Daniel Spear (right) joined the 54th July 19. Wounded at Olustee, Tomlinson resigned May 1864. (Library of Congress)*

Capt[ain] Jones laid silent with his feet toward our lines. A soldier of the 48th New

York wounded, laid across the embrasure and I lay with my head on his leg. Soon bullets began to come from our lines, and fall thickly among us. I asked Emerson, who was still fighting with a musket, to get a sand bag off the parapet to shelter Jones, he tried but could not and reported "Hornets too thick to do it Captain." The soldier, whose leg my head rested on, had been groaning a good deal. Now a bullet strikes him, he draws up his limbs and is silent forever.

This firing on us from the rear must be stopped and I order Lieut. Emerson to go to the rear and report our position, and ask for reinforcements. The brave fellow says, "I will go if ordered, but I am the only one unwounded and if I am killed and you get out tell them I went by orders and not because I was afraid."

Thinking that he was doing good service I concluded to try and go myself, so I tied my sword in the sheath and buttoned my revolver in its place, and crept to the opening in [the] parapet. The face of the work was swept by a hail of bullets, as I slid over to the water spent ones struck me like stones, soon I felt the dead under my feet in the edge of the water and I stumbled along towards the harbor beach and after several efforts managed to get up out of the ditch and out upon the beach.

From the Rebel Forts shells came screaming over the beach. Wounded men crawl or hobble back towards our lines. And many dead lie along the sand. After going some distance down the beach I turn to the right thinking that our troops that had been firing on us must be near. I am in great pain but the firing on us must be stopped, and I go across the Island in front of the Fort, there is

a steady fire of musketry from the Fort and shells of all sizes are bursting all around. I go to the edge of the marsh but find no troops except here and there a straggler behind a sand heap.

Then going back to the beach and lower down, I try it again, still I find no troops. Coming back to the beach I meet a mounted officer with his staff, to him I tell my story that we hold one bastion of the Fort and if reinforced can probably take it and that I will go back with the fresh troops. I am holding by his horses mane while I talk to him. He asks me If I am wounded, and then orders me to report to a surgeon and points me to a dim light over the beach and says he will go up to the fort and see to it. So I start down the beach again, soon I come to [Lieutenant] Tom Appleton and two more of our officers with our colors and perhaps sixty of our men. I speak to them and then go to the surgeon, he examines me and orders me over to a hospital below.

Just after I leave him some one fires a musket at me from the sand hillocks on my right. I go towards him but cannot find him. Then I find some wounded men halted on the beach, and see flashes of guns and hear bullets whistle by an officer with a broken arm, and faint with loss of blood, tells me that he has tried to pass the line but they fire at him. Some bodies lie before us of men that they have shot. We try to pass together and fortunately meet an officer. Asking what their firing on us means. They say they are to stop stragglers. I tell him that certainly does not mean wounded men ordered to Hospital. He then passes us and we soon reach hospital tents. I am made to lie down and given a cup of coffee, where I laid down on the sand a body had just been removed. Soon a lot of wounded are brought in and

some of us who can walk are picked up and started down the beach to a hospital boat, as I reach the beach an artillery driver with two horses meets me and offers to take me along with him on one of his pair of horses. He helps me on but the motion of the horse hurts my broken ribs so that I beg to get down and he transfers me to a passing ambulance, which takes me to the steamboat. Helped up the gang plank, the passengers in the ambulance find themselves on a crowded boat.

I am taken into the cabin and shown a place on the floor where I can lie down next to Adjutant [Wilkie] James, and near Capt[ain Samuel] Willard. The seats around the sides of the cabin and the carpeted floor are covered with wounded officers. Our Major Hallowell lies on the floor near the stairs that lead below. Outside the cabin the decks are covered with soldiers with every variety of wounds. I do not think we talked much. The surgeons moved round among us dressing wounds and I think gave us all opiates. At any rate I went off into a dead sleep and when I woke it was morning and we were out to sea.



*Based on an eyewitness Frank Vizetelly sketch, this engraving—dated July 19 and published in Illustrated London News—shows Union dead in the “moat” that lined the main wall the 54th*

*attacked. (The American Civil War Museum; Chronicle/Alamy Stock Photo)*

## POSTSCRIPT

**Sometime after he reached** a hospital ship late in the night of July 18-19, John Appleton added a postscript to the letter he had begun for his wife. He assured her, “The fight is over and [I] am out safely with two slight wounds, very slight, thank God.” Given the obvious difficulty he had writing, whether due to his wounds or circumstances aboard the hospital ship, it is doubtful his additional words eased Mary’s concerns. At least she knew he was alive; however, she must have been shocked when he listed so many of his fellow officers among the dead, wounded, and missing. Fortunately, she was able to assess his condition for herself when he was sent home to recover. He remained at home in Massachusetts for three months, finally reporting for duty back in South Carolina on October 24, 1863.

Appleton’s time leading Company A ended shortly after his return when he was appointed Inspector General for the brigade in late November and promoted to major, but he returned to serve with the regiment during the Florida Campaign in the winter of 1863-64. In that campaign, Union forces were sent to Florida to take control of the northern sector of the state and deprive the Confederacy of untouched farmlands there. The campaign failed, culminating with the Union loss at the Battle of Olustee on February 20, 1864.

When Union forces were withdrawn from Florida, Appleton returned to continuing efforts to capture Charleston. Exertion in the humidity and heat led to sunstroke and a physical collapse in July 1864, and he was again sent home to recover. Noting that his

wounds were not fully healed and that he had not entirely recovered from the effects of sunstroke, he resigned his commission on November 15, 1864, just 15 days before the 54th Massachusetts participated at the Battle of Honey Hill, S.C. After months at home to regain his health, he returned to service in the final days of the war, as a major in command of the 1st Battalion Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, and commander of Fort Warren.



*After an extended siege, Wagner's garrison, down to about 400 effectives, finally abandoned the fort overnight September 6-7. Some Black soldiers involved in the July 18 assault were part of the occupying force, as shown here. (Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society)*

Although the war ended before his command could be called to field service, Appleton remained at Fort Warren, which had become a prison for senior Confederate officials, including Vice President Alexander Stephens. He resigned from that post in August and almost immediately moved his family to West Virginia, where he lived for nearly 60 years, until his death in October 1913.

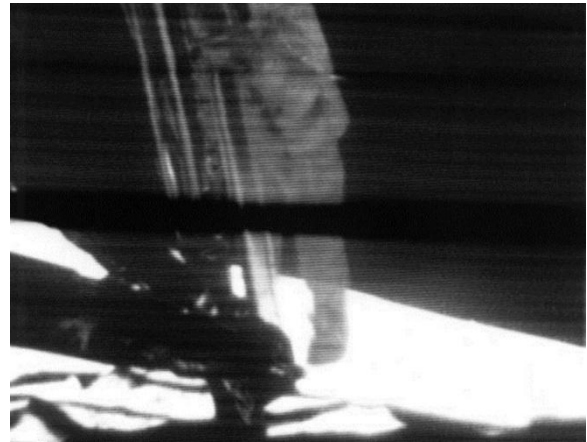
*The authors want to thank the West Virginia and Regional History Center for permission to use this portion of John Appleton's postwar journal. James Jewell and Eugene*

*Van Sickle, who teach history at North Idaho College and the University of North Georgia, respectively, are working on a book based on the journal.*

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## **The 1969 Moon Landing Started with the Astronomical Curiosity of a Union General**

By Norm Dasinger, Jr., July 11, 2022  
(originally published June 26, 2020), Blue and Gray Dispatch

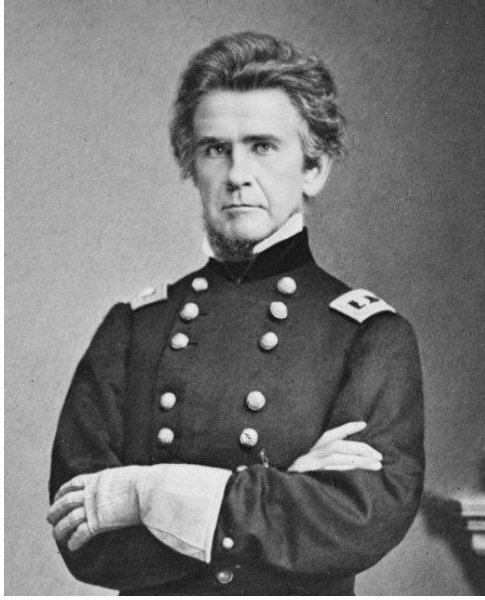


*Man's first step on the Moon, 1969 | NASA*

As Americans we take pride at being the only nation to have landed men on the Moon. Our country's strong desire to expand beyond our world and learn about the stars and the Moon has been part of our national identity for a long time. It really began with a Civil War general.

Ormsby Mitchel grew up in Ohio and was in the same West Point class as Robert E. Lee. He was a genius at mathematics and his favorite hobby was astronomy. After he graduated, he became a college instructor of math at West Point and then Cincinnati College (the forerunner of the modern University of Cincinnati).





*Ormsby Mitchel*

Mitchel believed the United States needed a world-class observatory. U.S. President John Quincy Adams—also an astronomy buff—had advocated for one during his term as president, but could not get Congress to fund it. Mitchel organized the Cincinnati Astronomical Society with dues set at \$25. Soon, the professor was off to Germany to buy the second largest telescope—at that time—in the world, with plans to bring it back to Cincinnati. But it needed a building. Mitchel worked tirelessly to raise the money for one. He was given the land for the structure and former President Adams—at 77 years old—arrived to give the keynote speech for the cornerstone dedication. Mitchel’s schedule was demanding. He taught his classes each day and then changed roles to work on fundraising for the observatory building. He got it done by lecturing all over the country, sometimes speaking to 2,000 at one time, telling people about the Moon and the stars. In addition, he started three publications devoted to the study of astronomy.

Then the Civil War came.

Commissioned as a general in the Union Army, Mitchel commanded the Department of the Ohio, and it were his troops who briefly assaulted Chattanooga, Tennessee, in 1862, and it were his men who carried out the famous “Great Locomotive Chase” (also known as the Andrews’ Raid).

Assigned command of the Tenth Corps at Hilton Head, South Carolina, he contracted malaria and died in the fall of 1862.

It is thanks to Civil War Gen. Ormsby Mitchel’s tireless efforts that brought the study of astronomy to the forefront of 19th-century America. Mitchel and his advocacy would lead to our nation’s continued interest in the Moon and the stars, with the establishment of NASA in the 20th century and eventually the Moon landing.



*Ormsby Mitchel/LOC*

## Fort Brooke, Florida

By Norman Dasinger, Jr., Blue and Gray Dispatch, July 15, 2022



*Fort Brooke, circa 1840 | LOC*

The last roll call of soldiers at Fort Brooke, Hillsborough County, Florida, took place in 1882, and the post was decommissioned in 1883.

Located on what is today the southern end of downtown Tampa along the eastern bank of the Hillsborough River, most of the fort's structures were situated at the current site of the Tampa Convention Center. It is interesting to note, the National Hockey League's Tampa Lightning play in Amalie Arena, which was a part of Fort Brooke.

In 1823, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun ordered the establishment of a military post along the northern shore of Tampa Bay. Cols. George Mercer Brooke and James Gadsden were charged with making this happen. The purpose for the fort was to curtail illegal activities along the Gulf Coast, contain the Seminole Indians as per the Treaty of Moultrie Creek, and establish a military headquarters for future incursions into the interior of the state as a prelude to the Seminole Wars fought between 1835 and 1842. With four companies of the U.S. 4th Regiment, Brooke and Gadsden established Cantonment Brooke, and it was

officially renamed Fort Brooke in 1824. By the end of the 3rd Seminole War, land around the site had developed into the small civilian community of Tampa Town—shortened to Tampa in 1855.

By 1860, Tampa was an important port for exporting cattle and crops from ranches and farms in the interior of central Florida. After Florida seceded in 1861, Fort Brooke was manned by forces of the Confederate States Army and, in June 1862, the U.S.S. *Sagamore* steamed into Tampa Bay and fired several shots at the fort and the adjacent town. The soldiers inside the fort responded with a volley in return. While the brief exchange had no effect, it did allow Union forces to determine the maximum range of the guns at Fort Brooke.

On October 16, 1863, two Federal gunships began to bombard the fort as a diversion for an amphibious landing by Union forces 14 miles away. These troops marched north of Tampa and arrived at the Jean Street Shipyards and quickly seized and burned several ships moored at the dock—all of which was owned by James McKay, a well-known family even in Tampa today. The Confederate soldiers of the 2nd Infantry inside Fort Brooke and some nearby cavalry were ordered to capture this Union raiding party and preceded north but were too late. While they managed to engage the raiders, the Federals withdrew to their gunships at the loss of 16 soldiers. Finally, in May 1864, Federal troops marched into Fort Brooke and the small but abandoned city of Tampa. Federal troops stayed there until 1869.

The only remains of Fort Brooke are two cannon now located on the campus of the University of Tampa.



*Cannon in Plant Park on the University of Tampa campus | CC*

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