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**Volunteering to lead: Combat affairs that shaped the command philosophy of Major Rufus R. Dawes, U.S.A. and Captain James Cooper Nisbet, C.S.A. (1861-1862)**

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*Volunteering to Lead: Combat Affairs that Shaped the Command Philosophy of  
Major Rufus R. Dawes, U.S.A. and Captain James Cooper Nisbet, C.S.A. (1861-1862)*

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Thesis

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*Dedicated to:*

*My Grandfather, for teaching me the importance of reading at an early age,  
my parents, for always supporting my history obsession,  
and to those who sacrificed everything for people they did not know.*

### Abstract

The frequently disorganized command structure which dictated American Civil War battles often resulted in direction of military strategy being passed over into the junior officer ranks. These volunteer leaders fought directly with the regular volunteer soldier that filled the ranks of both Union and Confederate armies. In exchange for their position amongst the common volunteer, the junior officers shared the same dangers in combat as their subordinates. In this study, junior officers Rufus Dawes and James Cooper Nisbet serve as the focus of a study that reveals what attributes contributed to the success and failures of command. Dawes, who served in the Union Army, ascended the junior officer ranks and eventually achieved a higher command as the war reached its zenith. A similar direction was also taken by Nisbet, who served in the formidable Confederate Army, and in the closing months of the war, found himself in regimental command, as well as an interim brigade commander. These young men can owe their success in high-command to their time in the junior officer ranks. The lessons learned in the early battles of the Civil War, assisted in their understanding of what characteristics and ideas worked in leadership, and what choices were appropriate for present combat situations.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Students of the American Civil War hardly have trouble locating stories of commanding officers who triumphantly parade through the annals of American history. General Ulysses S. Grant, William T. Sherman, Philip Sheridan, and even contentious and defeated Confederate commanders such as General Robert E. Lee, Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson and JEB Stewart have anchored themselves as staples of pride in American culture. Such stories of these rebel commanders fighting against often insurmountable odds, yet constantly exiting early Civil War battles as victorious, is in every way as American as anyone could imagine. For that reason, many students of the war have latched on to these rebel leaders just because American history is an underdog story and these Americans in rebellion did for their “freedom” and “rights” as underlings. Though this present and popular view is often misinterpreted into a misguided approach at understanding the Civil War, the popularity and fascination of Confederate leaders remains unrivaled to many American heroes.

As complex as Civil War history can be, some of the most intriguing and interesting aspects resonate in a relatively untapped source of information. Presently, if one were to gaze across one of the many National Battlefield Parks, silhouettes of equestrian statues, domes, and pyramids seemingly clutter miles of statutorily protected terrain. Mostly, these monuments are set in memory of Union and Confederate leaders that have influenced students of the conflict for generations. Many visitors of these parks unintentionally neglect to work their way off the beaten paths (which is allowed in most areas of the parks) and into the battlefield. However, if students do find themselves navigating the labyrinth of these parks, they are likely to cross a cenotaph of a fallen junior officer, or a stele of a regiment that fought valiantly for their own survival. Much like these concealed markers, the junior officer and his small unit who fought and gave their lives for their beliefs indicative of their country at the time, are often tragically left undiscovered. Their stories hold the reasoning of why a battle’s outcome occurred or a catastrophic failure resulted. Consequently many of these junior officers would contribute to a battle’s failure, especially in the first years of the Civil War.

Before delving into an analysis of the importance of the junior officer, what exactly is a junior officer? Junior officers are majors, captains, and lieutenants, and other field officers, junior to general staff, who often dictated and directed the flow of a Civil War battle.<sup>1</sup> Usually leading by example in the thick of the fight, most Civil War officers tallied up an absurdly excessive fatality rate throughout the conflict.<sup>2</sup> Junior officers who survived such intense combat often assisted in defining Civil War battles. They successfully assisted in so by fighting smartly and intelligently. Military regulations designed for Civil War officers required them to lead from the front. Often mounted in order to grasp a clear view of the combat to their front, these junior officers were subjected to relentless and devastating fire from the enemy.<sup>3</sup> As the war accelerated into a virtual bloodbath, many junior officers learned to adapt to the fight at hand rather than follow the “Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics” tactics regulated by the War Department.<sup>4</sup> However, even in adapting to the ebbs and flows of battle, wounds and close calls consistently barraged these officers. It took a special kind of discipline to clearly execute commands while under the stress and fatigue of constant campaigning. The Battle of Second Manassas is an instance where junior officers added themselves, mostly unintentionally, in great numbers to the casualty list. Many fell by simply doing what was expected of them.

On August 30, 1862, Major General Fitz John Porter ordered his V Corps forward at 3:30 pm.<sup>5</sup> The objective of the Federal force was an unfinished railroad cut tucked behind a belt of woods. This position was about a mile or so to their immediate front. Before the advance, many of the officers in disobedience with the officer handbook, wisely dismounted and opted to lead their units on foot. The open ground ahead proved to positively expose those officers who remained on horseback. Yet, some

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<sup>1</sup> Colonels, though considered a junior officer, frequently rose to brigade command during the Civil War. The position of brigade commander would therefore categorize these colonels as general staff, not of junior officer grade.

<sup>2</sup> Jenny Goellnitz, “Statistics on the Civil War and Medicine,” The Ohio State University, accessed May 19, 2019, <https://ehistory.osu.edu/exhibitions/cwsurgeon/cwsurgeon/statistics>. According to The Ohio State University department of history: “1 Army commander, 3 corps commanders, 14 division commanders, and 67 brigade commanders, including 32 generals, were killed in the Union Army.” “1 Army Commander, 3 Corps commanders, 7 division commanders, and 62 brigade commanders were killed in the CSA Army.”

<sup>3</sup> Hardee, William Joseph. *Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics: For the Exercise and Maneuvers of Troops When Acting as Light Infantry or Riflemen. Prepared Under the Direction of the War Department, Volume 1*. (Philadelphia: J.B Lippencott & Co, 1860), p 8. “The field officers, colonel, lieutenant colonel and major are supposed to be mounted, and on active service shall be on horseback.”

<sup>4</sup> Hardee, *Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics*, p 108. “...the instructor will then place himself twenty-five paces in front of them (the battalion)...” A recklessly exposed position.

<sup>5</sup> Hennessy, John J. *Return to Bull Run: The Campaign and Battle of Second Manassas*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 339.

remained in the saddle, in seeming wanton ignorance of the obvious danger that presented itself to those commanders. Colonel Edward Frisby of the Thirtieth New York Infantry found himself as the vanguard of the assault. At this point, the war is still relatively young. Inexperience and bravado still plagued the mind of many officers, junior and senior alike. Leading by example still proved to be the top priority of the junior officer. Colonel Frisby thought for this attack to succeed, his men must see him at the front of his regiment, a sort-of compliance to Hardee's handbook.<sup>6</sup> Thusly, he remained mounted as the New Yorkers stepped off shortly after 4:00 pm.

Upon emerging from the small belt of woods, the Upstaters could see the Confederates under Colonel Leroy Stafford prone against the banks of the 'Deep Cut'.<sup>7</sup> Suddenly a devastating volley tore into the New Yorkers from the Rebel defenders. Colonel Frisby jolted in his saddle. A bullet had found its mark and tore away part of his lower jaw. Clutching his mangled face he would away help from Major Morgan Chrysler, stammering for him to go back to his post.<sup>8</sup> Gathering whatever remaining energy he had left, Colonel Frisby spurred his mount on, still thinking that the importance of his position at the head of the advance meant everything to his men. Just then another impeccably aimed volley from the Confederates roared across the front of the New Yorkers. Colonel Edward Frisby toppled from his horse, after a ball smashed square into his forehead.<sup>9</sup> The importance of smartly leading a unit in such a battle is crucial in the success of that attack, especially in the prolific turmoil that quickly develops in combat. The attack at the Deep Cut soon stalled and was repulsed mainly due to communication issues in the command structure.<sup>10</sup> One smart possibility of the failure of the attack is due to many of the officers falling at the head of their commands before the objective was even reached. In turn, the immediate breakdown of regimental command was dooming many of the advancing Federal regiments even before the chance respond to the Confederates was given. Nonetheless, though in such an unfortunate circumstance, Colonel Frisby was indeed following the tactics and regulations that were demanded of

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<sup>6</sup> Hardee, *Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics*, p 8. Entree 27 states: "The colonel will take post thirty paces in rear of the file closers, and opposite the center of the battalion. This Distance will be reduced whenever there is a reduction the front of the battalion." Colonel Frisby elected to be positioned thirty paces in-front of his line, rather than behind. A common practice of the colonel during the early stages of the war.

<sup>7</sup> Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run*, 341.

<sup>8</sup> Rufus W. Clark, "Heroes of Albany", accessed May 19, 2019, <https://albany.nygenweb.net/bio-157.htm>. Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run*, 341-342.

<sup>9</sup> Clark, "Heroes of Albany." Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run*, 342.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

field officers in that time. Later, the importance of observation, common sense and scrambling for survival would rule supreme, rather than following a dated military hand book.

Two celebrated and well-known junior officers that took full advantage of disregarding common battlefield tactics of that time were Colonel John Brown Gordon and Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. Each man held the remarkable ability to smartly lead through confused combat situations as well as serving the duration of the war with a consistent enthusiasm towards command excellence. Both Gordon and Chamberlain volunteered their services to “country” with no previous military training. Each man went on to most deservingly obtain the rank of general in their respective armies, only after repeatedly showing incredible leadership skills in combat. Their climb to Civil War legend began in the junior officer ranks. To understand what influenced many a junior officer’s evolution in tactical ideology, a separate examination of these two military phenoms finest strategic moments is necessary.

By mid-morning on September 17, 1862, the Battle of Antietam had been already raging for hours while each side had fought to a bloody stalemate on General Robert E. Lee’s left flank. A breakdown in the Union II Corps command persuaded General William B. French to advance his Federal division far to his left and directly towards Lee’s center, which was arguably the Confederate’s strongest defensive position. The pinnacle of the Confederate center was a sunken farm lane. This well-traversed lane now served as an outstanding defensive position for Confederate brigades under Generals George B. Anderson and Robert Rodes.<sup>11</sup>

Colonel John Gordon’s Sixth Alabama found itself directly in the center of this sunken lane.<sup>12</sup> To Colonel Gordon’s right was a dip in the terrain, a gathering of trees, a walking trail and then the ground began to rise considerably for thirty yards to the front of the sunken farm lane. To Colonel Gordon’s left, where the regiment’s defense began, the topography presented itself identically, sans a small gathering of trees. Although the gently rising ground to his front caused problems for his position, Colonel Gordon had immense confidence in his battle-tested veterans. So much so that the excited Colonel Gordon sharply

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<sup>11</sup> Robert K. Krick, “It Appeared As Though Mutual Extermination Would Put a Stop to the Awful Carnage: Confederates in Sharpsburg’s Bloody Lane.” in *The Antietam Campaign*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 223-258.

<sup>12</sup> Krick, “Confederates in Sharpsburg’s Bloody Lane,” 229. The Sixth Alabama was part of General Robert Rodes brigade. Rodes’ brigade held the center of the sunken lane. His regiments aligned as followed: Left to right, Twenty-Sixth Ala. Twelfth Ala. Third Ala. Fifth Ala. Sixth Ala.

commented towards General Lee and his staff “These men are going to stay here, General, till the sun goes down or victory is won!”<sup>13</sup> Colonel Gordon’s words eventually turned out to haunt the regiment. The position the Sixth Alabama held was at most, precarious. “My troops held the most advanced position on this part of the field,” Colonel Gordon stated later in his explanation of the battle. “It was evident...that my small force was to receive the first impact of the expected charge...”<sup>14</sup> Colonel Gordon mapped out his plan first by observation. Though he did hold a decently formidable position, his regiment was nonetheless exposed. The queer sunken road protruded into a vulnerable salient position for the Confederates. The lane arched from a slight arrow point, slightly retreating back from the Sixth Alabama’s position at the point. The high ground at his front would also do him no favors. The Federals had the ability to shoot down into the sunken lane if they elected to stay put atop the crest of the ridge to the Confederate front. Fortunately for Gordon, the Federals failed to realize the Confederate flaw for at least an hour before exposing the fatal flaw. Colonel Gordon attempted to reconnoiter the position to his front a bit more, however his strategizing became interrupted by a line of blue advancing towards his immediate front.

Colonel Gordon was forced to improvise. The front line of the advancing Union troops “...came to a charge bayonets...”<sup>15</sup> informing Colonel Gordon that the enemy’s rifles were not loaded. The Federals intended to push right into the sunken lane without pausing to fire. The Federals specifically relied on their large regiments who could push their way through the center of the Alabama brigade with overwhelming force. Gordon understood that and reflected upon memory that the Sixth Alabama had usually been the ones advancing on a formidable enemy position. He knew what the Federal plan was and now it was he who had to “...stand fast, holding the centre under whatever pressure and against any odds.”<sup>16</sup>

Colonel Gordon now had to make his final decision, and fast. Should he fire on the Federal lines, now only one hundred yards distant? No, not yet, he calculated. At one hundred yards, Colonel Gordon

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<sup>13</sup> Gordon, John B. *Reminiscences of the Civil War*. (San Bernardino: First Rate Publishers, 2018), 41.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon, *Reminiscences*, 41.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

could now see white gaiters on the pressing Federals' ankles.<sup>17</sup> At this point, as a veteran of two major campaigns, Colonel Gordon knew the Federals well and correctly observed that no veteran soldier would wear such an unnecessary and uncomfortable piece of gear during campaigning season. Those Federals had to have been raw troops, fresh from the Washington D.C. parade grounds. Colonel Gordon was correct. General Max Weber's green brigade has never seen combat before, and the Sixth Alabama was about to "...turn loose a sheet of fire and lead into their faces."<sup>18</sup> Knowing very well that his foe would collapse after such a deviating fire at close range, ostentatiously Colonel Gordon stood at the center of his prone line and waited until the Federals were yards away before giving the command to fire. Without waisting another second, the Sixth Alabama unleashed a horrific volley that knocked the whole Federal front line down "with a few exceptions" in a "...consuming blast."<sup>19</sup> Due to the devastating effect of the volley, the opposing Federals broke and ran to reform out of sight, only to reform and attempt to dislodge the Confederates once more.

Colonel Gordon's observation of terrain and knowledge of his enemy had assisted him in his tactical choices. If he had let his soldiers fire before the advancing Federals were within sufficient range, the momentum of the advance would more than likely overwhelm the Sixth Alabama's soldiers attempting to reload their rifles. However, the success of his Alabamians eventually dwindled into an inevitable disaster. As Colonel John B. Gordon strode defiantly along his veterans in his trademarked perfect and erect posture, four balls would find their mark upon the exuberant Colonel.<sup>20</sup> A fifth finally knocked the stubborn man unconscious. As Colonel Gordon's men carried him from the now Bloody Lane, the tide had turned against the Confederates who stubbornly held the lane. Union forces finally broke the difficult defense and poured into the center of General Robert E. Lee's exhausted and depleted army. If not for the Federals notorious incompetence of high command, the day might have been lost for the Confederates and Colonel John Gordon's apparent mortal wounds might have been acquired superfluously.

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<sup>17</sup> Gordon, *Reminiscences*, 42.

<sup>18</sup> Sears, Stephen W. *Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam*. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983), 237-238. Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Current, Richard N, et al. *Encyclopedia of the Confederacy*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 696-697.

Yet Colonel John Gordon lived and to this day is recognized as one of the more successful Confederate generals during the war. Attributing much of what he experienced in the Bloody Lane to his success as a leader of men. Gordon reiterates in his memoirs that the Battle of Antietam "... left its lasting impress upon my body as well as upon my memory."<sup>21</sup> Almost a year later, Colonel John Gordon's intellectual doppelgänger would etch his legacy into an obscure hilltop and ultimately into the annals of the United States Military Academy.

Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain who valiantly lead the Twentieth Maine Volunteer Infantry through many of the Army of the Potomac's infamous battles, is well known in Civil War lore of as the "Lion of Little Round Top."<sup>22</sup> Colonel Chamberlain's quick thinking and overall incredible attention to detail in the face of sure defeat, would contribute to the preservation of the Army of the Potomac on the evening of July 2, 1863. Colonel Chamberlain would separate himself from many of the average junior officers through the show of courage, determination and tactical skill.<sup>23</sup> The prowess he showed in the ability to quickly learn military tactics was thinking short of phenomenal. Undoubtedly, the battle of Little Round Top at Gettysburg would be the Twentieth Maine and Colonel Chamberlain's finest hour. In the late afternoon of July 2, 1863, Colonel Chamberlain and the Twentieth Maine would be posted on the extreme Union left near the saddle of two rocky hills named Little and Big Round Top. Almost immediately upon placement, General James Longstreet's seemingly crushing assault reached the Union left as an Alabama tide began to roll across the Twentieth Maine's front.

For hours, repeated attacks by Colonel William C. Oates' Fifteenth Alabama attempted to overwhelm the exhausted Twentieth Maine, yet the incredibly resilient backwoodsmen refused the Alabamians constant assaults. However, Colonel Chamberlain noticed the stubborn Mainers began to fatigue. The extreme heat and choking smoke, held in place by the thick canopy of foliage that covered the slopes, did not pair well with a dwindling ammunition supply or the willpower of the relentless Confederate force.

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<sup>21</sup> Gordon, *Reminiscences*, 40.

<sup>22</sup> Through many historians are keen and quick to attack General Chamberlain's recollections of battle as well as rightly question his personal accounts of his accolades; his ability to successfully command as a junior officer and later, a general officer, cannot be disregarded as anything but successful.

<sup>23</sup> Coddington, Edwin B. *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command*. (New York: Touchstone, 1968), 393.

There was no way the Twentieth Maine could hold off another frontal assault by the seemingly unfazed Fifteenth Alabama. In accordance with his keen understanding of the situation at his immediate front, Colonel Chamberlain decided to “refuse” the Confederate line. He did this by bending his regiment at a right angle, preventing the constant flanking maneuver attempted by Colonel Oates and his Alabamians. Colonel Chamberlain then sent Captain Walter G. Morrill’s Company B to take position behind a low stonewall to the left of the Twentieth Maine’s position.<sup>24</sup> This maneuver would support the Twentieth Maine’s main firing line on their left flank while providing a devastating fire to the right flank of the unsuspecting Fifteenth Alabama. However this positioning would only hold out for so long. The well-positioned Company B could not replenish the physical and replace mental fatigue the Twentieth Maine and the Fifteenth Alabama were experiencing. Colonel Chamberlain was running out of options. If he were to withdraw from his position, the whole Union Army’s flank would be left in the air and exposed to a devastating attack. Quick analysis of his Southern foe to his front determined that they too, were exhausted from the repeated attacks. In addition to this, the hot sun and lack of water was doing neither side favors.<sup>25</sup> Colonel Chamberlain realized he must attempt something. The Twentieth Maine had held onto the hillside for nearly two hours, but sensing that his men could not hold on for much longer, Colonel Chamberlain ordered the Twentieth Maine to fix bayonets and prepare to charge.<sup>26</sup>

Minutes later the Twentieth Maine leaped over their breastworks and into the exhausted Alabamians. Stunned, Colonel Oates ordered a retreat, but not before Captain Morrill’s Company B stood up and unleashed a shattering volley into the retreating Confederates.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, the Alabamians ran for safety to the other side of the adjoining Big Round Top. Colonel Joshua Chamberlain’s quick thinking and decisive and tactical execution assisted in an absolute route of the enemy force. Colonel Chamberlain’s astute understanding his men’s ability and the importance of his position for the greater good of the Union Army assisted in his tactical decisions and moreover the Union Army’s successful

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<sup>24</sup> Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign*, 386, 393.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 391. Colonel Oates blamed his failure on his canteen detail that was unfortunately captured before the attacks began.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 394. Chamberlain, Joshua L. “After Action Report: Headquarters 20th Maine Vols. Field near Gettysburg, Pa. July 6th, 1863,” accessed May 19, 2019. <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/combat-studies-institute/csi-books/chamberlain.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. Chamberlain, “After Action Report.”

defense on July 2nd. All of which stated previously is only something that a junior officer could ever know.

Colonel Joshua L. Chamberlain is well known not only to students of the Civil War but also by students of all subjects of American history. “Chamberlain” can even be considered a household name in the United States. Consequently, with such fame, exaggerations of exploits come with the report. Students of this conflict must be leery of both the account and a skeptic’s questions. Joshua Chamberlain could very well have embellished a few minor details of the Twentieth Maine’s charge, but overall what lead up to his decision to execute the now infamous order is more less undisputed. It is the charge of the Twentieth Maine itself that has many people interjecting themselves into the lore. Personal exploits are always of interest but ultimately rarely turn the tide of the battle. However, the command decisions that Colonel Chamberlain made in a time of extreme turmoil and pending defeat is nothing short of extraordinary.

Colonel John B. Gordon and Colonel Joshua L. Chamberlain are the prototypical Civil War success story. Their uncanny ability to succeed if the face of impending defeat is what makes these soldiers unique. But what is it that made them so successful as junior officers? For one, both were educated men. John Gordon attended the University of Georgia and then moved on to study law. Eventually he became a newspaper editor in Milledgeville, Georgia and then a coal mine director afterwards.<sup>28</sup> Gordon’s ability to command and think logically through difficult predicaments could be attributed to his many career tracks and job holdings. Given his job titles, Gordon was a man who saw it all.

Just as his success as a military commander, Joshua Chamberlain’s accolades are those of legend. A graduate of Bowden College and Bangor Theological Seminary, Chamberlain is believed to have known up to nine foreign languages as well as a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Eventually he would become a professor of rhetoric at Bowden College. Obviously extremely intelligent, and what some may judge as an overachiever, Chamberlain was destined to champion military command.<sup>29</sup> But, were there junior

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<sup>28</sup> Current, et al. *Encyclopedia of the Confederacy*, 696-697.

<sup>29</sup> Wallace, Willard M. *Soul of the Lion: A Biography of General Joshua L. Chamberlain*, (New York: T. Nelson, 1960), Chapter 1.

officers who were not fortunate enough to be inherently gifted in education that conducted themselves similarly in combat? And if so, did their post war upbringing prepare them for the horrors of war? Were they also able to readily combat difficult situations just as the military phenoms John B. Gordon and Joshua Chamberlain were adept in doing? The short answer is yes to all of these questions. However, we must delve into the minds of lesser known junior officers in order to achieve the answers to these questions. To appreciate the importance of the junior officer in combat, is to understand the ever-changing combat philosophy as the American Civil War droned on. But where did volunteer field officers learn to smartly lead? The answer is less complex than we may think. The junior officer educated themselves within the ranks of the enlisted man. Our search for these answers leads us to two men from two completely different walks of life. In 1861 Madison, Wisconsin and Dade County, Georgia could not be further apart.

## Chapter 2: The Roots of Leadership

To become a respected leader of soldiers is not an easy task and in order to be a successful commander, integrity, discipline, intelligence and acceptance are all traits that were toted at every juncture of command. However, as each of those traits are all absolute and equally important in command, a soldier's acceptance of an officer can be argued as the most vital attribute. At the outbreak of the Civil War, the standard idea shared between the enlisted volunteers was the notion of equality with their immediate superiors. Quite often, the volunteer knew of the junior officer placed in command of their unit, and in all likeliness found themselves frequently involved in the same predicaments that accompanied military life.<sup>30</sup> Yet commonly, many of these aspiring leaders likely found themselves in such positions of command in due to the officer's social status in their communities.

Consequently, a large demand for volunteers to enlist at the outbreak of the Civil War, in effect diluted the junior officer pool, and resulted in many appointments of junior officers who were not fit for the pressures of command. John D. Billings of the Tenth Massachusetts Battery noted of early junior officers: "...the result often was officers who were diamonds in the rough, but liberally intermingled with veritable clod-hoppers (foolish individuals) whom a brief experience in active service soon sent to the rear."<sup>31</sup> Thereby, a commonly shared perspective by the enlisted man caused, in many cases a discomfort in command for many junior officers. To infuse discipline into the ranks, let alone gain any sort of acceptance from the volunteer, became one of the most difficult uphill battles the junior officer had to fight. However to counter this, the idea of leading by example more often than not won over many the volunteers in a combat unit. Heroics in an engagement did however resinate in a very positive manor in the eyes of the volunteer soldier, but as previously noted with the tragic outcome of Colonel Frisby at Second Manassas, the result of reckless bravado more often than not, end in a deadly demise for that junior officer.

Besides heroism in battle, a sentiment that could sway the most difficult soldier is the junior officer sharing commonalties with the enlisted man. While sharing the same beliefs and social

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<sup>30</sup> Linderman, Gerald F. *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in The American Civil War*. (New York: Macmillan, Inc. 1989), 37.

<sup>31</sup> Billings, John D. *Hardtack and Coffee: The Unwritten Story of Army Life*. (Los Angeles: Enhanced Media Publishing, 2016), 17.

backgrounds, camaraderie did ultimately evolve rapidly as the average Civil War soldier spent most of his time encamped and surrounded by contemporaries and officers alike. The necessity to understand what a respected junior officer could contribute to a soldier's attitude and confidence. A pair of junior officers who often shared a similar tendency of successful leadership in battle, resilient camaraderie with their unit, a common ideological approach, and a display of constant psychical rectitude; are Captain James Cooper Nisbet, CSA and Major Rufus R. Dawes, USA. These two leaders that evolved into extremely competent leaders of men over the early years of the Civil War. Eventually, each junior officer advanced into a position of regimental command, a feat that could not have been accomplished for many volunteer junior officers without learning to command on their own accord in the darkest hours of the Civil War. While following Captain Nisbet and Major Dawes through their most difficult and trying moments as junior officers, their command decisions, ability to adapt and calmly execute orders under stress, as well as observing their rare ability to clearly navigate through an intense and chaotic situation, can lead to an answer of how and why these seemingly average men, tossed into a heavily diluted and sophomoric officer pool, became successful combat leaders.

In 1856, James Nisbet was seventeen years old and a recent high school graduate out of Rome, Georgia. At average height with piercing blue eyes and light brown hair, Nisbet must have stuck many as a handsome man, and according to his high level of literacy, displayed a willingness and eagerness to understand and learn. Upon taking his fervor for education to Oglethorpe University, he excelled in his studies and graduated college in three years at the age of twenty in 1859.<sup>32</sup> James Nisbet showed an extreme interest in his families lineage and also of world history and affairs. The Nisbet's could trace their family roots all the way back to Scotland's epic battles led by William of Orange, and eventually to the climatic battle of Bothwell's Bridge. Where in 1679 his personal hero, Captain John Nisbet of the Army of the Covenant was captured and eventually executed in 1685 for treason.<sup>33</sup> The stories of his warrior ancestors resonated early in James Cooper Nisbet's psyche. Nisbet constantly reiterates in his memoirs that the "Scotch-Irish" were the cultivators of Southern heritage and "specifically, the rank and file of the

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<sup>32</sup> Nisbet, James Cooper. *Four Years on The Firing Line*. (Chattanooga: Imperial Press, 1914), 17-19.

<sup>33</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years on The Firing Line*, 7.

Southern armies boasted some of the best blood on earth.”<sup>34</sup> As the troubles with the British became supererogatory, the Nisbet clan eventually immigrated from Scotland, settling in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. James Cooper Nisbet’s grandfather, James Nisbet II (James Cooper Nisbet’s namesake) graduated from Jefferson College in Philadelphia in 1730 and took his medical practice to North Carolina.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, James Alexander Nisbet, the young James Cooper Nisbet’s father, settled into a law practice in Macon, Georgia, where James Cooper Nisbet would call his home until the outbreak of war.

Nisbet’s interest in history and his intense pride in his Scottish heritage undoubtedly sculpted his personal ideology of the United States. He never once stated on record any disdain or contempt for the Northerner, even following the most grueling combat one could experience. Nisbet especially respected Pennsylvanians, most likely due to his family’s ties to Philadelphia and the large Scotch-Irish demographic that settled in western Pennsylvania. He generously offered his subjective yet interesting opinion on the influx of Scotch-Irish volunteers into the Union Army. He asserted that the incursion of these Scotch-Irish into the Union Army would ultimately seal the Confederate State’s fate: “When this Scotch blood gave its impulse to the Union Armies after 1862, it poured in from Western Pennsylvania, Indiana, Illinois... it did more to turn the tide of battle which at first set in favor of the South...”<sup>36</sup> Nisbet’s understanding of Northern culture was accompanied with a bit of respect. His usage of “Civil War” to describe the conflict rather than the common Southern verbiage of “War of Northern Aggression” or “Yankee Invasion of The South” often used by many Confederate veterans post-war, demonstrates Nisbet’s ability to adapt to the change within his Southern culture, even following the outcome of the Civil War.

However, as a slaveholder before the Civil War, Nisbet displayed an inability to compromise in his differences with the African-American race. Thus, his seemingly impressive adaptive ability to change could not effectively sway his strong Southern beliefs. Reflecting upon his idea that former slaves and freedmen were his inferior, even after the conclusion of war, Nisbet would record: “I have studied the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 14.

full-blooded negro, under the most favorable circumstances as slaves and freed-men. I find it impossible to disagree with the scientific conclusion that he is an inferior species of the human race.”<sup>37</sup> As many Southerners did post-Civil War, Nisbet, like many other Confederate veterans, struggled with adapting to the idea of the integration of African-Americans into Southern culture. The staunch Southern ideology of the day did not allow most to accept these changes in their lifetime. But unlike most of his contemporaries, Nisbet did admit, before his passing: “No one could read the record (the history of the Civil War), and refuse to admit that slavery was abolished in the province of God; because its purpose was accomplished; the time was ripe for its cessation.”<sup>38</sup> Nisbet’s thoughts of slavery never substantially influenced his decision to fight in the Civil War. Unfortunately, Nisbet is undeniably guilty of embracing the ignorance of the popular Southern ideology of the day. Though later on in life, upon relenting that the “cessation” of slavery was necessary, it can be interpreted as an attempt to adapt to the changing cultural landscape in the reconstruction-era South. With that relenting statement, Nisbet showed more adaptability than most of his brethren cared to show in the wake of reconstruction. It is acceptable to theorize that his feelings of social matters in the south were maturely accepted and shared with many of his men he commanded in battle.

In 1860, James Cooper Nisbet left his cattle farm in Dade County, Georgia, to observe his sister’s graduation from Abbott’s College in New York. He took in all of the Northern sentiment of the upcoming election and recollected that “the agitation which had been going of for sixty years culminated in the election of Lincoln...” Nisbet went back home to Georgia to tell of his observances of the Democratic party split to his friends. Most of them already familiar with the news, offered their unabashed disgust and refusal to “stand that” towards young James. Intrigued yet seemingly indifferent to this divide, he responded casually “then... there will be war.”<sup>39</sup> Nisbet was unquestionably observing the crowd of friends. He knew he eventually had to choose a path in this seemingly inevitable war. As he calculated the matter, James Cooper Nisbet tried to sort through the rush of thoughts running through his mind: Should he join the manic crowd clamoring for secession? The idea seemed grand, but the underlying thought that

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 418.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 438.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 28.

caused his pulse to race was the very reality that he could be killed before his twenty-first birthday. Was his life worth the defense of his home?

Far away in Juneau County, Wisconsin, similar thoughts were filtering through the mind of a twenty-two years old aspiring businessman named Rufus Dawes. Dawes was just as fortunate as James Nisbet to come from a family of American prestige. His great-grandfather, William Dawes, who along with Paul Revere, warned many colonists of the approaching British army in 1775. Frequenting between Ohio and Wisconsin during his teenage years, Dawes attended the University of Wisconsin in Madison but eventually finished his studies at Marietta College in Ohio, graduating in 1860.<sup>40</sup> As the fanaticism of war reached its apex in early 1861, Dawes recalled: “Nothing beyond the opportunity (of going to war) was asked.” His fear, like countless other young men, both North and South was that the war might be over before most young men had the chance to prove their patriotism and mettle in combat. To these spry young men “... some one else would get ahead and crush the rebellion before they got there.”<sup>41</sup> Rufus Dawes was red with patriotism and the coming war put his enthusiasm to the test.

Noted Iron Brigade historian Alan T. Nolan, who abridged Rufus Dawes’ recollections of the Civil War in *A Full Blown Yankee of The Iron Brigade: Service With The Sixth Wisconsin Volunteers*, states that Dawes “...called himself an Abolitionist...”<sup>42</sup> The issue Dawes himself held with the establishment of slavery in the South was indeed shared by many others in his unit. Wisconsin, being as north as one could get at that time in American history, was full of immigrant stock. Mainly consisting of German and Scandinavian decent, these hearty people were accustomed to hard work, seemingly insurmountable odds, and the daily task of fending for themselves. A slave somewhere in the South, practically a world away from those European immigrants, could not help them through a rough winter, or assist in tending their land, which they cleared, planted and farmed by themselves with nothing but the will and goal of prosperity. Freedom was the ultimate American dream for these formally persecuted immigrants, and though thousands of miles away, every man deserved a chance at freedom, slave or not.

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<sup>40</sup> “Historical Essay: Dawes, Col. Rufus R. (1838-1899),” Wisconsin Historical Society, Accessed May 26th, 2019, <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS2572>.

<sup>41</sup> Dawes, Rufus R. *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin Volunteers*, (Marietta: E.R. Alderman & Sons, 1890), 6.

<sup>42</sup> Dawes, Rufus R. *A Full Blown Yankee of The Iron Brigade: Service With The Sixth Wisconsin Volunteers*, Introduction by Alan T. Nolan, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), vii.

In an April 26, 1862 in a letter written outside of Fredericksburg, Virginia, Rufus Dawes recounted that many escaped slaves flooded the Sixth Wisconsin's camp as well as many of the surrounding units. "No system of abolition could have swept the system (of slavery) away more effectually than does the advance of our army" Dawes recited. As he continued to look on at the remarkable spectacle of pseudo-freedom, he could see soldiers of another regiment throwing a fugitive slave hunter, who was searching for a fugitive, out of their camp. Pleased with the ensuing result, Dawes went on and assert that "thus the great question of liberty is working its own solution." To Dawes, his calling to service was assisting in the enabling of freedom of a race of people, and to his pleasure, the men he fought with shared much of the same sentiment as he. Dawes closes his letter with the prediction that "the right must, and surly will triumph in the end."<sup>43</sup> He believed that an invasion of the south was in the right and absolutely necessary in the preservation of his beloved country. However, at this point in his service Rufus Dawes and the Sixth Wisconsin had yet to have experienced active combat. Only time would tell if the freedom of men they did not know would be worth the sacrifice of life in battle.

In April 1861, the inevitable Civil War ignited in Charleston Harbor. The call for volunteers rang through every town, North and South. Michigan, Wisconsin's midwestern kin, eagerly sent their first regiments into Washington D.C. Wisconsin would follow shortly after and added their own midwest strength to the growing numbers of Union volunteers. Three months later in early July, Rufus Dawes made a decision. He chose to offer his life for the preservation of his country and the abolition of slavery. As Rufus Dawes made his way through the crowded streets of Madison, Wisconsin in search of an enlistment post, James Nisbet found himself at the foot of a coal mine at Raccoon Mountain, Dade County, Georgia, searching for his family friend, John B. Gordon.

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<sup>43</sup> Dawes, *Service With The Sixth Wisconsin*, 40-41.

### Chapter 3: Influenced to Lead

James Cooper Nisbet idolized an assortment of military commanders in both the Union and Confederate armies during the Civil War. His recollections of officers as well as battles provided a stimulating neutral account of the conflict from his point of view. Nisbet's thoughts are especially intriguing considering they were collected recorded in an era where preserving Confederate memory became the popular cornerstone for recording Civil War history. A rather rare character of a Southern man for his time, James Nisbet proved to be a most capable and complete junior officer during his service in the Confederate Army. His longevity as a field commander as well as his remarkable ability to regularly emerge from battle unscathed is nothing short of astonishing. However at the outbreak of the Civil War, James Nisbet felt as torn as any Southern man at that time. The oncoming war offered these men few choices. In staying put at home and maintaining their livelihood, one could hope that the conflict might resolve itself and workout to the benefit of both Northern and Southerners. But the social pressures of proving ones worth as a masculine protector of Southern society caused many Southern men to yield to the community and enlist into a local militia.

James Nisbet and his brother John wanted to fight for their homes, but the two were partners together in a cattle business outside of Macon, Georgia called *Cloverdale*. John was only a year older than James, and both "...had never been separated for any length of time, until the breaking out of the war."<sup>44</sup> The two siblings ultimately decided to draw straws and James Cooper came up short. John W. Nisbet joined the Second Georgia Volunteer Infantry in April 1861.<sup>45</sup> Notwithstanding to the pressures of Georgia's fervor for war, James Nisbet was provoked into offering his service to his home. Nisbet began his search for the perfect unit to enlist in, finally finding his champion John B. Gordon, raising a company of paladins equal to himself called the "Raccoon Roughs." The unit consisted of coal minors in which Gordon knew and employed before the idea of war resonated with them.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years on The Firing Line*, 195.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 194-195. Upon promotion to the colonelcy of the Sixty-Sixth Georgia Infantry in 1863, James Cooper Nisbet would request that his older brother John's battalion: Twenty-Sixth Georgia Infantry, be transferred over to the Sixty-Sixth Georgia Infantry. John Nisbet would be Major of the Sixty-Sixth Georgia ad the two brothers would be reunited after a separation of nearly three years.

<sup>46</sup> Gordon, *Reminiscences*, 1-2. Ibid., 34.

James Nisbet was very much in awe of the young Captain Gordon. Gordon and his wife, Fanny were the Southern facsimile of the British nobility in which James Cooper Nisbet assiduously and obsessively studied as a young man. Nisbet's idolization of his cavalier ancestor, Captain John Nisbet took the form of Captain John Gordon. Rather than only read upon as he could only do so about his dear ancestor, the young Captain Gordon became someone who Nisbet could presently and directly observe. To Nisbet, John and Fanny Gordon's "...domestic life was ideal"<sup>47</sup> and the enchantment the Gordon's would cast upon young James had a lasting effect upon his decision to join the Confederate ranks. Though, Captain John Gordon's great appreciation towards young James' for his eagerness to join the Raccoon Roughs was genuine, Nisbet recalled that Gordon "...advised me to raise a company. In that way I could be of more service to the Confederacy"<sup>48</sup> However disillusioned Nisbet may have been from his rejection from service with Gordon, it was not evident. Such encouragement from Nisbet's idol to lead on his own, invigorated James Cooper Nisbet eagerness to serve. But not as a lowly private, as an officer.

"I am working like a beaver to get my company in active service" writes Captain Rufus Dawes to his brother Ephraim Dawes, a then college student in Ohio. Captain Rufus Dawes in his trademark unrelenting determination, found himself compelled to write a constant stream of letters to Wisconsin's Adjutant General's office to find a place for his company. Grumbling to his brother, he had even sent "... John Turner (influential citizen) to Madison, to see the Governor."<sup>49</sup> To no avail, Rufus Dawes opted to seek guidance from one of his heroes: Captain John M. Balfour, a veteran of The Duke of Wellington's British Army.<sup>50</sup> Dawes was in a panic; he did not want to miss out on squashing the rebellion. He shared the same view as most of his sparsely recruited company that they were surly going to miss the war.

In a disturbingly prophetic antiphon, the distinguished Captain Balfour calmed the anxious Dawes: "Don't fret, young man, your company will be needed. Those Southern people are determined war upon us. It will take years to put them down. You'll see...this is no job of sixty days."<sup>51</sup> Captain

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<sup>47</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years on The Firing Line*, 35.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Dawes, *Service With The Sixth Wisconsin*, 8. John Turner was a newspaper editor for the Mauston Star.

<sup>50</sup> John Turner "Hurrah For Juneau County: The "Minutemen" Organized," *The Mauston Star*, May 1, 1861, <https://newspaperarchive.com/mauston-star-may-01-1861-p-2/>. Dawes, *Service With The Sixth Wisconsin*, 8. John Balfour was nearly Eighty years-old and on the committee along with Rufus' father Henry Dawes in forming the Lemonweir Minute Men. The company in which Rufus Dawes formed.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Balfour was hauntingly correct. Soon enough a letter in response to Captain Dawes near steady agitation was received. But Dawes as ready as he was to fight, had hardly any recruits for the Lemonweir Minute Men. Frantically the generally prepared Captain Dawes sent out recruitment posters on June 17, 1861. Finally, after a few more weeks of agitation and anxiety, the ninety-six Lemonweir Minute Men set out for Camp Randall in Madison, Wisconsin, led by twenty two year old Captain Rufus R. Dawes.<sup>52</sup>

Excited as he and his men were to show the Rebels “what fur,” Captain Dawes had no military training whatsoever. The effect of this on his leadership would have been dreadful if it were not for the fortunate circumstances in which he and his company found itself in. Upon arrival to Camp Randall, the Lemonweir Minute Men were formed into Company K of the Sixth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry.<sup>53</sup> The Sixth Wisconsin’s legendary construction took place at this training ground. Fortunately, the formation was guided by some of the most intense, able and competent officers the Union Army could muster.

The adjutant of the Sixth Wisconsin was Lieutenant Frank Haskell. One of the most well-written and astute officers the Union Army would produce. To Dawes, Adjutant Haskell was a godsend. He took immediate liking to Captain Dawes and assisted in turning Company K into and formidably drilled unit. Though never a combat officer for the Sixth Wisconsin, Haskell was one of many efficient officers who filled the junior officer corps of the Sixth Wisconsin.<sup>54</sup> Captain Edward S. Bragg of Company E also quickly became an influence upon the young Captain Dawes. Captain Bragg went on to distinguish himself on many battlefields while eventually leading the Sixth Wisconsin in some of the most chaotic moments of its Civil War tenure. Bragg would go on to secure rapid promotion but his recklessness in combat resulted in grievous wounds. The aggressive leadership style Bragg displayed imitated that of a bare-knuckle boxer. The relentless commander rolled up his sleeves in battle as if in a bout.<sup>55</sup> Captain Dawes spotlighted Bragg in combat as he attempted to absorb every aspect of his command style. Both Dawes and Bragg were phenomenal combat leaders, and each lacked any military training before joining the Union ranks. However, they were fortunate to have the likes of many veteran officers encompassing

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<sup>52</sup> Dawes, *Service With The Sixth Wisconsin*, 11.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 12,18.

<sup>54</sup> In February 1864, Haskell is finally appointed to the colonelcy of the Thirty-Sixth Wisconsin Infantry, only to be killed while leading a charge four months later at Cold Harbor.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

them while drilling and in combat. A few of these officers who Captain Dawes would owe to his sculpting into a competent junior officer were Captain Adam Mallory and Lieutenant John Marsh, who were veterans of the Mexican War. Captain Alexander S. Hooe, whose father was career regular army officer, was a firm leader, and the two German transplant officers, Lieutenant Fred Schumacher and Lieutenant Werner Von Bachelles served as irreplaceable role models to Dawes.<sup>56</sup>

German immigrants and veterans of many armies and wars in Europe assisted in forming the strong core of the Sixth Wisconsin. Constant drilling and attention to detail in every formation reigned indispensable in the preparation of unpredictable combat situations. Captain Dawes, made it a point to go out of his way and view the instruction of his German colleagues, carefully observing the ridged and precise discipline instilled by Lieutenant(s) Shumacher and Von Bachelles into Company F. “The influence of this splendid company and its Lieutenants, was marked in stimulating others equal to their performance” remarked Captain Dawes.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the stubbornness of the Sixth Wisconsin’s German core manifested itself as a defining trait of the regiment and not to the chagrin of the regiments dusty and irascible colonel, Lysander Cutler.

Cutler, a naive of Maine and a veteran of combat with Aroostook Indians was a practitioner of education and mill work, as well as being flat broke. But the forlorn Colonel Cutler demanded discipline from his companies. If his junior officers did not produce, they would be cashiered.<sup>58</sup> Upon the Sixth Wisconsin reaching the drill grounds of Washington D.C, Colonel Cutler would eliminate seven junior officers from the ranks immediately, alienating the regiment to a man.<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, Captain Dawes and the other juniors would admire the man. The discipline he demanded would be imperative in their success on the battlefield. As the Sixth Wisconsin was mustered into service on July 16, 1861, the unit finally moved on to Washington D.C, then to Baltimore, and then back to Washington D.C. Outside of the outskirts of the capital is where the Sixth Wisconsin joined the ranks of its new brigade. King’s Brigade,

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<sup>56</sup> Dawes, *Service With The Sixth Wisconsin*, 12-13. Nolan, Alan T. *The Iron Brigade: A Military History*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 15-16.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

made up of the Sixth and Fifth Wisconsin and the Nineteenth Indiana, commanded by the brigade's namesake, Brigadier-General Rufus King.<sup>60</sup>

Down in northwestern Georgia, Captain James Nisbet finally found his company. The eager eighty-five man roster now stood idly, waiting to be sent to the front. But Nisbet and his men would have to wait a bit more, for "it took a political pull in those early days in '61' to go off to war" Nisbet complained.<sup>61</sup> Interestingly enough, Captain Nisbet did have "political pull." His father being a very distinguished judge in his own Dade County, Georgia. Lamenting the decision not to ask assistance of his father, Nisbet fortunately received a letter from his friend Algernon Hamilton who was departing for Richmond, Virginia with his newly formed company out of Floyd County, Georgia. Nisbet jumped at the information. He attached his eighty-five men to Hamilton's company and departed Chattanooga, Tennessee on June 21, 1861, bound for Richmond, Virginia. Donned in "regular United States Army blue..." along "...with a sword and belt gifted..." from his sister and sister-in-law, Captain James Cooper Nisbet was determined to lead to the best of his ability.<sup>62</sup> Arriving on the Richmond New Fair Grounds, Company "H" was mustered into service on July 2, 1861.<sup>63</sup> James Cooper Nisbet was now officially a Captain in the Twenty-First Georgia Volunteer Infantry. However, for a rag-tag grouping of men, the Twenty-first was in first-rate company with its officer corps.

Captain Nisbet's regimental commander, Colonel John T. Mercer, was a former United States Army Dragoon. Mercer was a competent commander, but his vice of drinking before battle proved to hamper his ability to command his regiment. All too frequently, the command of the regiment was forced into the hands of its junior officers. Fortunately for the regiment, these officers behaved themselves competently on a consistent basis. Upon his disgraceful exit from command, Colonel Mercer relinquished the command of the Twenty-First Georgia to his Adjutant Thomas Hooper. Hooper led nicely in battle but it was Major Thomas Glover whose command skill Captain Nisbet took more of an interest in.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 16, 153. On August 9, 1861, the Nineteenth Indiana, ironically was added to King's Wisconsin brigade. On the 27th the Second Wisconsin joined the brigade. The Fifth Wisconsin would be eliminated and replaced by the Sixth and Seventh in October of 1861 and nearly a year later on August 26, 1862, the Twenty-Fourth Michigan would be added to the brigade.

<sup>61</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years on The Firing Line*, 36.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas, W. Henry, *History of the Doles-Cook Brigade, Army of Northern Virginia, C.S.A.* (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Company, 1903), 343. Ibid., 44.

Thomas Glover, a former physician in Georgia before the war, was as fearless as a warrior. The major's *modus operandi* became evident by those who served under him almost immediately in their first engagement. Always at the head of the skirmish line, Glover and his constant straightforward nature would demand excellence and a quick response from his men in battle. Quickness and the ability to relentlessly advance, even under the most devastating fire, was the defining characteristic of the Twenty-First Georgia in battle. Nisbet constantly observed Glover in battle and revered him as a critical influence in his own leadership style. In April 1864, Major Glover was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel of the Twenty-First Georgia. Sadly, five months later, a bullet fatally found Lieutenant-Colonel Glover at the Battle of Winchester. It was his alleged one-hundred-seventh engagement with the unit.<sup>64</sup>

Admittedly “not very proficient in Hardee’s Tactics,” Captain Nisbet searched for instruction of drill around the Fair Ground.<sup>65</sup> Soon he requisitioned a sergeant from a nearby Kentucky regiment who Nisbet deemed “proficient” enough to instruct Company H. Nisbet’s yearning to become the best officer he could possibly be prompted him to join the ranks with a musket to physically learn the drill formations along side his men.<sup>66</sup> According to Captain Nisbet, Company H consisted of “mountain” men and farm boys.<sup>67</sup> The gap between the cultures of he and his rough yeoman soldiers was extensive and Nisbet knew he would have to infuse himself into the ranks, directly, to gain their trust and respect. But as Captain Nisbet attempted to absorb every drop of instruction on drill and leadership, the Twenty-First Georgia’s ironically gray-cladded contemporaries were bidding for action in near by Washington D.C.<sup>68</sup>

From Fall 1861 to spring of 1862, King’s Brigade and the Sixth Wisconsin spent its time on picket duty in the vicinity of Washington D.C. and Baltimore, Maryland. Their only action was running into secession supporters in Baltimore and being plugged with rocks, bricks and a few bullets while on

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<sup>64</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years on The Firing Line*, 41. Thomas, *History of the Doles-Cook Brigade*, 345.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>68</sup> Dawes, *Service With The Sixth Wisconsin*, 14.

guard duty.<sup>69</sup> Captain Dawes wisely took this time to bond with his troop and partook in song-singing with his friend Captain Edward Brown and even "...tossing men in a blanket," a game where his men "...became expert..." at. Captain Dawes himself tried once and recalled "having no desire to repeat the experience" afterward.<sup>70</sup> Levity would fill Dawes' personality and fortunately for his men, so did kindness. The captain would frequently carry the knapsacks of his exhausted men as they marched around Northern Virginia as well as attending church services with them, though the captain was moderately religious at best.<sup>71</sup> Captain Dawes' kind nature smiled upon him on July 1, 1862 when he became Major Rufus Dawes. His rival and friend Frank Haskell, tallied thirteen officer votes while Dawes edged him with fourteen. Major Dawes asserted that he owed his appointment to major of the Sixth Wisconsin to his friend Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Bragg, who Dawes recollected always worked hard in support for him as well as Captain Edward Brown who displayed a constant supportive nature for his friend Major Dawes.<sup>72</sup>

Major Rufus Dawes and Captain James Cooper Nisbet evolved quickly and seamlessly settled into their rolls as leaders in their junior officer ranks. Each man effectively made sure that he gained the trust of his men as well as earning their respect. The aspect of trust and respect could be observed as underrated by many Civil War officers, general staff included. As Dawes and Nisbet neared the inevitable storm of combat, the chaos that overlaps clarity in battle will call for assurance and courage to be displayed by its regiments officers. Over the previous year, Major Dawes and Captain Nisbet vehemently studied their men to understand their capabilities. "I don't believe there can be better soldiers" Rufus Dawes wrote to his brother Ephram upon reflection before their first battle.<sup>73</sup> James Nisbet in similar observation recorded "...prompted by pride, zeal and a sense of duty" his men "...were born fighters."<sup>74</sup> Each man projected strong words about their units and fortunately for Major Dawes and Captain Nisbet, they were correct in their opinions. However, 1862 would be a challenging and exhausting year for both Union and Confederate armies.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 18. Nolan, *The Iron Brigade*, 18.

<sup>70</sup> Dawes, *Service With The Sixth Wisconsin*, 32.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>74</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years on The Firing Line*, 53.

#### Chapter 4: The Shenandoah Valley Campaign

The protracted winter of 1861 into 1862 proved to be a time of reorganization for each of the inexperienced armies. To the masses of men that seemingly roamed aimlessly in the vicinity of Washington D.C., the first Battle of Manassas seemed ages ago. As both the Union and Confederate Armies began to reorganize their forces, Captain James Cooper Nisbet and the Twenty-First Georgia Infantry found themselves attached to a new unit. The Georgians were added to General Richard S. Ewell's division, and into the Seventh Brigade commanded by General Issac R. Trimble.<sup>75</sup> Having yet to see combat, the Twenty-First Georgia Infantry settled into winter quarters around Centerville, Virginia in October of 1861.<sup>76</sup>

Captain Nisbet spent his time in the freezing winter camp breaking up fights over liquor and attempting to navigate the haphazard Confederate commissary department. The winter of 1861 into 1862 was particularly harsh; in an effort to retrieve clothing for his frozen men, Captain Nisbet ended up under arrest for being absent without leave. Even though his colonel instructed him to carry out the deed.<sup>77</sup> Thus was the chronic state of the Confederate Army's command structure which plagued units with their incompetence for the duration of the war. The incident probably did not bother Captain Nisbet much. At least his men would now know that he cared about their wellbeing. Howbeit the monotony of camp life would be soon disturbed by a small skirmish while loading railcars, a skirmish that became the Twenty-First Georgia's first encounter with the enemy and Captain Nisbet's first brush with executing commands.

Selected as work detail to load a railcar of provisions for the Confederate Army's advance towards the Yorktown Peninsula, Captain Nisbet and Company H became the target of Federal Napoleon guns from across the Rappahannock River. "Shells were bursting around us" recalled Nisbet.<sup>78</sup> As a company commander, Captain Nisbet was now to instruct his troops for the first time. Nisbet's combat routine became manifested at this moment. The options that coerced action were made evident immediately. Confederate calvary, which served as his advanced pickets, began to flee at his front. The

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<sup>75</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years on The Firing Line*, 55. Trimble's Brigade consisted of the "two twenty-ones," Twenty-First North Carolina and Twenty- First Georgia Infantry, Fifteenth Alabama Infantry and Sixteenth Mississippi Infantry. The Twelfth Georgia Infantry would be assigned to the brigade after the Seven Days Battle.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

Confederate horsemen were pursued back across the river by the Federal Irish Brigade. Despite the defining ordnance deluging about the rail-hub, Nisbet harkened a piercing engine whistle which jarred him out of his lethargic state. He bounded for the engine and ordered an immediate halt until all of the provisions were loaded properly.<sup>79</sup> Still the Federal artillery fire and pressing infantry charge seemed to be overwhelming the small company. Nisbet returned to his command and steadied his men. They braced for the inevitable clash with the pressing Federals who now attempted to ford the river as well as dash across a rail bridge to their immediate front. General J.E.B. Stuart's Confederate calvary rallied in time to stymie the charge. The troopers broke for the rail bridge and began setting the structure ablaze, halting the Federal crossing. Captain Nisbet brought up the rest of his company to support the disarranged horsemen but the men he ordered forward were lacking proper equipment. However, Nisbet regrets that "in the excitement I did not take much notice of the recruits, who were standing there under the shelling, unarmed."<sup>80</sup> The men were determined to get into a fight, but the excitement of the moment clouded their minds. Captain Nisbet's baptism of fire held every characteristic of combat chaos, albeit on a small scale. Nevertheless, a clear understanding of the situation regardless the size of the spectacle is imperative for success in combat. Fortunately for Captain James Nisbet and Company H the situation at the depot did not develop into a major engagement.

The Federals withdrew before the skirmish developed into a full-scale engagement. Fortuitously, Nisbet averted a disaster as the result of the Federal withdrawal. In view of this, Captain Nisbet's understanding of battle reveled itself as an ever-changing procedure. In his military career as combat increased in ferocity, Nisbet smartly applied a constant evaluation of his guidelines as incomprehensible situations and chaos forced itself upon he and the Twenty-First Georgia. Observation of the battlefield then deployment of commands rather than deployment of the unit then observing while already engaged with the enemy, was the idea that saved lives and won the day.

As the winter of early 1862 dissipated, one of the first full-scale military campaigns in the eastern theater of war came to fruition quite rapidly. In early March, General Thomas J. Jackson sought to relieve the pressure of a mass buildup of Federal forces upon Virginia's Yorktown peninsula under Union General

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<sup>79</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years on The Firing Line*, 56.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

George B. McClellan. Orders from the Confederate capital in Richmond, Virginia flowed into the General Jackson's headquarters. The Shenandoah Valley was to be under his watch as was the incorporation of an immediate diversion of troops from the Peninsula. The protection of its natural food resources would be imperative for the sustaining of a functional army let alone the entire war-effort. The Valley served an alternate importance as well. The use of its high mountain outcroppings could screen an attack from the watchful eyes of Washington D.C. The Federal high-command observed this threat, and President Abraham Lincoln called for a force thirty-thousand strong under General Nathaniel Banks to descend into the Valley to relieve this notion of surprise. However, the speed and execution of Jackson's small force of five-thousand troops would wreak havoc upon The Federals under General Banks as the protection of the "breadbasket" of the Confederacy would now be under General "Stonewall" Jackson's bizarre and distant gaze.<sup>81</sup>

On March 23, The Battle of Kernstown resulted in General Jackson's first and only defeat in the Shenandoah Valley. Kernstown informed Jackson that he would be viscosly outnumbered in the Valley and that he would have to adapt to the far numerically superior Federal forces pursuing his every move. A cat and mouse game ensued, as it evidently became Jackson's only option. A month later, after falling back through the Valley, Jackson's command would swell to almost twenty-thousand troops, thanks to General Richard Ewell's presence. On April 30, The Battle of McDowell resulted in the route of General John C. Frémont's Federal forces at the peak of the Allegheny Mountains, northwest of the Shenandoah Valley. Jackson could now turn north up the Valley and reclaim the previously lost ground capitulated one month earlier.<sup>82</sup>

On May 23, Captain James Nisbet and the Twenty-First Georgia stood beside a dusty road at "present arms."<sup>83</sup> The Georgians watched as General Richard Taylor's Louisiana brigade dashed into formation at a crossroads before the small town of Front Royal. Flawlessly executing its deployment, Taylor's brigade immediately advanced at the double quick and captured the Federals, the town and to

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<sup>81</sup> Chris Howland, "Stonewall's Shenandoah Showdown," *America's Civil War*, March 2014, 54-57.

<sup>82</sup> William J. Miller, "Gray Eagle on a Tether," *America's Civil War*, November 2002, 46-52, 88. Allen, Randall. et al. *Campaigning With Old Stonewall: Confederate Captain Ujanirtus Allen's Letters to His Wife*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998) 84-85.

<sup>83</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years on The Firing Line*, 78.

Nisbet's astonishment even before Trimble's Brigade could form into lines of battle.<sup>84</sup> The Battle of Front Royal would have been Nisbet's first intensive combat experience if it were not for the experienced and decisive Louisianan's near-flawless combat savviness. Once again Captain James Nisbet became an observer to a crack combat unit. Using his keen observation skills, Nisbet began to understand that it was imperative that speed took initiative in battle. Catching units in retreat was to pay in favorable dividends to an undersized force in pursuit. Captain James Nisbet and the Twenty-First Georgia would get their chance to execute such exactitude in combat in twenty-four hours.

At dawn on May 25, General Richard Ewell's division deployed on the Federal left around the outskirts of Winchester, Virginia. General Issac Trimble and his Two Twenty-Ones advanced along the Millwood Turnpike. Steadying his line, Captain Nisbet called for strict alignment as he rode ahead of his company. Nisbet kept an eye on the Twenty-First North Carolina advancing about fifty yards ahead of the Twenty-First Georgia to their right but just as the North Carolinians disappeared into a cedar thicket, "a battery on a hill in town opened upon us" Nisbet remembered.<sup>85</sup> Simultaneously a Federal volley opened to the right of the Twenty-First Georgia and penetrated the Twenty-First North Carolina as they exited the woods. The Twenty-First North Carolina was stunned and their advanced stalled and threatened to sever their connection with the Georgians. Command broke down as nearly all of the North Carolinian officers were casualties as a result of the previous volley from the concealed Fifth Connecticut.<sup>86</sup> Glancing over to his regiment just as the Connecticut Federals fired another volley into the Carolinians, Colonel Mercer of the Twenty-First Georgia ordered his company commanders to double quick to their immediate right to retain a connection with the Carolinians as well as assist their stunned comrades. In an iterative measure, especially to his company, Nisbet steadied his line just as orders to fire an enfilade volley into the flank of the Fifth Connecticut were given. Company H directed a volley into the Federals, which in turn drew some of the fire away from the Carolinians. Nisbet remembered the dense smoke from the rifles of either side as it coagulated above the battlefield. He then recalled that the Twenty-First Georgia "...received a

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<sup>84</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years on The Firing Line*, 78.

<sup>85</sup> Howland, "Showdown," 56. *Ibid.*, 56. Battery "B" Fourth US Artillery positioned atop Camp Hill.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 86. According to James Nisbet. Thomas, *History of the Doles-Cook Brigade*. 350. The Fifth Connecticut took a position behind a stonewall.

volley from another regiment behind a fence at right angles to the first...”<sup>87</sup> But the torrent of bullets was aimed high over the heads of the Georgians. The strategy of unrelenting movement towards the enemy position threatened an overlapping of the disorganized Federal flank. The Two Twenty-Ones recuperated and concentrated together as they pushed to within yards of the stunned Federals. “We kept going to the right, until we got into the rear of the enemy” minds Nisbet.<sup>88</sup> The idea of constant movement without laps, perviously observed as Taylor’s Louisianan’s pushed into Front Royal a day before, undoubtedly resonated in the minds of Nisbet and the other Captains of the Twenty-First Georgia. The Federals began to fall back through the streets of Winchester, as Nisbet and the victorious Georgians congratulated themselves on their first combat victory.

At the Battle of Winchester, Captain Nisbet was under a regimental command rather than independent command as he and Company H were at the rail depot. Yet he still applied observation to steady his troop as they advanced and eventually overwhelmed the Federal position. Control and placement of his company was maintained in relatively good order. Much in thanks to the Battle of Winchester being an utter Federal route, Captain Nisbet and the Twenty-First Georgia would not be susceptible to constant and concentrated rifle and artillery fire. Thusly the Two Twenty-Ones freely maneuvered as they pleased in the face of the enemy. Captain Nisbet executed his orders precisely and gained more combat experience.

Furious at the embarrassment suffered at Winchester, General John C. Frémont pressured the Confederates under Jackson into a steady retreat. Unbeknownst to Frémont, the retreat was necessary for Jackson’s command in order to choose the ground on which he wanted to fight upon, and also fight each pursuing Federal force separately. As Jackson concentrated his forces around the vicinity of a small settlement called Cross Keys, Union General James Shields moved to Jackson’s front and gave battle.<sup>89</sup>

At 9:00 am on June 8, General Issac Trimble’s brigade took position atop a small rise to the front of a clover field.<sup>90</sup> Twenty-First Georgia scrambled up to a rail fence and dropped to the ground. Nisbet and the company commanders gave the order to load and prepare for the impending attack. The junior

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<sup>87</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years on The Firing Line*, 56. This regiment was the Forty-Sixth Pennsylvania. Ibid, 87.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>89</sup> Current, Richard N. et all. *Encyclopedia of the Confederacy*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993). 430-431.

<sup>90</sup> Allen, *Campaigning With Old Stonewall*, 102-107. Ibid., 93.

officers observed the pending battle. To the Twenty-First Georgia's immediate front, a mass of Union blue materialized rapidly. The woodlot behind the regiment along with the fence concealed their position. The long line of blue advanced in perfect order, methodically. Nisbet and the other captains noticed the Federal's neglected to deploy skirmishers. As a result of this rather lazy and dangerous approach, the Federals would stumble into the Confederate firing line without any warning.<sup>91</sup> The line of blue began to close in as the Georgians took aim at the targets.<sup>92</sup> As the Federals crested the rise to Nisbet's front, the banners of the Eight New York Infantry became legible. The New Yorkers approached to within fifty yards to the Georgian's front. At forty yards, the officers of the Twenty-First Georgia belted the anticipated order to fire. "Sudden as lightning the whole fence seemed converted into a volcano more terrible than Vasuvius (sic)" as one of Nisbet's colleagues Captain Ujanirtus Allen recalled. Captain Nisbet and Captain Allen steadied their companies as they rammed home their second round of buck-and-ball cartages. The close range of these shotgun-like blasts decimated the New Yorkers, who lost nearly three-hundred men instantaneously.<sup>93</sup> "The Blue-coats halted, and tried to return fire" Nisbet recalled. "We gave them two more rounds then charged over the fence."<sup>94</sup> Captain Nisbet and the other officers saw the opportunity to bag an entire Federal regiment. The Georgians, using the tactic of unrelenting advancement, plunged into the confused Federals. Captain Allen recalled in a letter to his wife that "our boys mount the fence like deer and follow down the hill shooting stragglers..."<sup>95</sup> As the Georgians swept down the hill, their impetuous pace propels them into the Sixteenth Mississippi to their right. Nisbet and the energized Georgians "...charged right over them..." and into the fleeing New Yorkers.<sup>96</sup> The Federal command was shattered and the pressing Confederate counterattack negated an attempt for a rally. Captain James Nisbet and the Twenty-First Georgia routed their first opponent.

Nisbet was now a veteran soldier. "Stonewall" Jackson's valley campaign conditioned the Twenty-First Georgia into assuming combat situations would result in their favor. At the Battle of Cross Keys, Captain Nisbet exercised his command to the best of his ability, for he was once again under

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<sup>91</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years on The Firing Line*, 93.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Current, *Encyclopedia of the Confederacy*, 430-431.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Allen, *Campaigning With Old Stonewall*, 104.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 104. Ibid., 94.

command of the regimental staff. Observation and control of his men, raced through his mind as he kept his company jointly in accordance with commands. An ideal defensive position atop a rise, behind a fence and at the front of a wooded area resulted in surprise for the Federals. Pursuing a much larger force after a stunning volley once again presented the Georgians with the best opportunity for success. Nisbet undoubtedly noticed that utilizing the landscape of a battlefield can shift momentum and also present a significant issue for the enemy. As Nisbet's command and responsibility increases, his understanding of a battle's landscape will be the deciding factor in victory or complete decimation of his unit. In the meantime, the Army of the Potomac was knocking upon the gates of Richmond.

### Chapter 5: The Battle of Gaines' Mill

As Captain James Nisbet and the Twenty-First Georgia were cutting their teeth in combat with “Stonewall” Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley, Captain Rufus Dawes and the Sixth Wisconsin stood idly. The Midwesterners lounged around the picturesque Virginia town of Fredericksburg, as the war seemingly passed them by. Though on May 10, a ruckus jolted through camp as rumors swirled that there was to be a fight soon enough. However, Captain Dawes recalled “...there were not enough rebels in the vicinity to accommodate our men with the desired fight.”<sup>97</sup> The Sixth Wisconsin returned to a state of intense boredom. On May 17, the regiment’s hopefulness was boosted when a shipment of “...white leggings, black felt hats adorned with feathers and white cotton gloves” arrived at camp headquarters.<sup>98</sup> Spirits lifted greatly as the Midwesterners paraded around camp in their regular army uniforms. A sense of pride and identity now covered the forlorn thoughts of missing out on the war. Now donned in regular’s uniforms, much was to be expected from Dawes and the Sixth Wisconsin. The unit would undoubtedly get their chance to fight, but not before Captain Rufus Dawes is subjected to a surprise of his own. On July 1, Dawes is promoted to Major.<sup>99</sup> Now his responsibilities grew to one half of the regiment, even before their first battle together. However, he and his men would still have to wait another month before they were given the chance to offer their services to the defense of their country. Until then, they sat impatiently, as winter thawed.

The officers of the Twenty-First Georgia stared at their colonel as he laid motionless in a pine thicket. Federal artillery shells rained down on the Georgians at a constant pace, but Colonel Mercer was not dead, but drunk. Lt. Colonel Thomas Hooper, Captain James Nisbet and others tried rousing the man back to consciousness, but to no avail.<sup>100</sup> Upon seeing no other option, Lt. Colonel Hooper took over the command of the Twenty-First Georgia. The Federal shells seemed to increase their range and now the ordinance directly targeted the troubled regiment. Nisbet saw to his company and just in time to see Taylor’s Louisiana’s leap into a steep ravine not two-hundred yards to their front and left. The Georgians

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<sup>97</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*. 44.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>100</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years On The Firing Line*, 116. Sears, Stephen, W. *To The Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992). 229.

always observed Taylor's aggressive Cajon's pitching forward, so that evening would be nothing different for the brigade. The officers of the Twenty-First Georgia looked ahead to study what was to their front. An abandon shack stood next to an unkempt dirt field. For a quarter mile beyond that, the field ran into a rapid decline towards a swampy marsh and an ankle deep stream, that provided a natural obstacle for an advance. The trees beyond that stream looked to be felled intentionally to create fields of fire for three long and fortified blue lines that ascend a hillside up to a white farmhouse. To each side of the house, countless batteries of Federal guns added their reinforcement to the entrenched Federal infantry.

It was 4:00 pm on June 27, 1862 and the Battle of Gaines' Mill had been raging for nearly three hours.<sup>101</sup> General A.P. Hill's normally stout division was stymied by the fierce Federal fire seemingly coming from every angle upon that hill. To relieve General Hill's exhausted command, General Richard Ewell brought his division forward, immediately sending General Richard Taylor's Lousianians into the fray.<sup>102</sup> Captain James Nisbet and the Twenty-First Georgia watched their Cajon mentors return shattered in spirt and visibly distraught. The Lousianians broke after their beloved Major Roberdeau Wheat was killed instantly as he foolishly stepped out in front of his command. Colonel Issac Seymour attempted to rally the beleaguered brigade but was struck down as well.<sup>103</sup> Stunned at the sight of the fleeing Lousianians, Nisbet took note that this day would be won only on the junior officer's accord. Foolishness would only get someone killed.

"Just then we were ordered in" recalled Nisbet. "We met the Louisiana Brigade coming out in good order. One said 'Boys you are mighty good but that's Hell in there.'"<sup>104</sup> Undaunted and disregarding the comment as an overreaction, Nisbet and his company pressed forward. The Georgians began to fall from the Federal rifle fire. As the regiment descended the slope and into to the muddy creek, Nisbet rallied his company on the opposite bank. He quickly counted heads and noted "Lt. Easley and six...had been killed, and about ten...wounded."<sup>105</sup> Nisbet calmed his men and helped them pick targets amongst the Federal breastworks. It was all he could do until field commands were ordered.

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<sup>101</sup> James Nisbet called this battle "Cold Harbor" in his notes.

<sup>102</sup> Sears, *To The Gates of Richmond*, 229. General Taylor was not present, he was ill. Command shifted to Colonel Issac Seymour.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years On The Firing Line*, 110.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

Federal ordinance along with his men was falling all around at an alarming rate.<sup>106</sup> Nisbet knew it was important to retain composure in order to effectively command his company. Lt. Colonel Hooper found Captain Nisbet and informed him that “Captain Waddail waves his seniority...” to Nisbet’s favor.<sup>107</sup> Nisbet looked at the man and realized Hooper was severely wounded in his arm. Just as soon as Hooper had passed command over, he was gone. Captain James Cooper Nisbet, twenty-three years old, found himself in command of a regiment, pinned down and in what some claim to be the worst firefight of the war.

Nisbet observed the situation. He needed to pull the regiment back in order to formulate some sort of plan. His regiment was in danger of being completely routed. Nisbet remembered that he “... hastened down the line ordering the officers to draw their companies back...”<sup>108</sup> His idea was that controlled order gave the regiment the best chance to survive the day and capture the objective. The regiment withdrew back over the ravine and behind a knoll to its immediate rear. Nisbet now placed the regiment in a more covered position behind the creek. However, the Georgians were still pinned down by an incredible Federal fire. The regiment could not keep at their rally point much longer, so Nisbet called his company commanders over and explained the situation. They would press the attack rather than withdraw from the field. On his orders, the regiment would advance rapidly over to the opposite side of the creek, to the position they previously held. However, this time the Georgians were to deliver suppressing fire in the prone position, an idea Nisbet conjured upon having observed that the Georgian’s fire was more effective from the creek’s bank, given the concealment offered by the creek bank.<sup>109</sup> Nisbet led the advance and his Georgians followed close behind.

As the Twenty-First Georgia engaged the stubborn Federals from their position on the banks of Boatswain Creek, Captain Nisbet “... noticed that the enemy was retreating up the hill towards their battery.”<sup>110</sup> The whole Confederate line began to advance after the Federals who were pulling back to the crest of their defenses. Nisbet ordered his companies forward and to keep a close correspondence with the

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<sup>106</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years On The Firing Line*, 110.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

fleeing Federals. Nisbet kept the regiment pressing on towards the hill's crest, darting ahead and exposing himself carelessly to Federal fire. The regiment began to stride closer to the Federal batteries, but Nisbet's recklessness had consequences. "A shell bursting just as it passed me, the concussion blew me up in the air six or eight feet" he remembered.<sup>111</sup> Two men trailing Nisbet dissolved into thin air following the blast. Captain Nisbet was incredibly lucky to have survived leading in front of his command in the face of such devastating fire. After gathering what was left of themselves, Captain James Nisbet and the Twenty-First Georgia collapsed beside the Watt House that evening, carrying the day but at an enormous cost.

That night, Captain Nisbet accompanied a few soldiers in a search for their missing brother. They soon came across the poor boy who was nursing a mortal head wound. The group comforted the boy and reassured him that they did in fact capture the Federal position. His spirits lightened but soon after he died, fortunately along side his brothers. Captain Nisbet knew that in accompanying his men in times like these meant the world to them. Unfortunately for Nisbet, treks in search of dead or wounded friends became far too frequent. In his memoirs, he mourns upon this story: "Many such pathetic incidents came under my observation. In the battles herein described. I don't like to dwell on them."<sup>112</sup> Though as painful as it must have been for Nisbet, he still assisted his men, because he cared for them, and needed them.

The Twenty-First Georgia intended to mend after Gaines' Mill, but the pursuit of General George McClellan's Union Army did not relent. A month before the Seven Days Battles, the Confederate Army found itself under a new commander. General Robert E. Lee assumed command of the troubled defense of Richmond following the wounding of General Joseph E. Johnston. For a month General Lee strengthened his defensive lines that surrounded the Confederate capital. McClellan's inability to organize an advance on his thin lines befuddled Lee. Therefrom rather than ordering a collective defense of the Confederate capital as he originally planned, General Lee opted for an atypical advance upon the Union positions surrounding Richmond.<sup>113</sup> An odd strategy for the then cautiously labeled general. At this time of the hostilities, Lee was not the wily grey fox that we know him as today. His tact for alluding and outmaneuvering the Federal armies was not yet his forte. Throughout the Confederate papers, Lee was

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<sup>111</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years On The Firing Line*, 111.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>113</sup> Sears, *To The Gates of Richmond*, 151.

known as the King of Spades or Granny Lee as he preferred defensive positioning rather than the often unpredictable and offensively aggressive strategy the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia would be infamous for. But now George McClellan and the swollen Chickahominy River offered Lee an opportunity to throw the Federals off the gates of Richmond.<sup>114</sup>

The day before Gaines' Mill, the Battle of Beaver Dam Creek undoubtedly added to Lee's belief in the success of an offensive strategy. As Confederate forces under General A.P Hill poured into the face of Federal forces heavily fortified in swampy and unforgiving terrain on the outskirts of Mechanicsville, Virginia, a bloodbath ensued. If not for General George McClellan's irrational inability to command a battle, Robert E. Lee might have exhausted his forces in a constant frontal assault for days. However, McClellan withdrew to a more favorable defensive position behind Boatswain Creek the next day and in wake of the withdraw of the Federals, the Battle of Beaver Dam Creek resulted in 361 Federal casualties to the Confederate 1484; a costly Confederate loss.<sup>115</sup> At Gaines' Mill the following day, Union casualties totaled 6,837 to the Confederate's 7,993.<sup>116</sup> Lee devastated his army in his relentless frontal assaults, but also inflicted massive losses upon the Federals. However, for the Federals, they could morbidly afford casualties at an increased rate. Their ability to recruit and sustain massive armies trumped the Confederate States effort to recruit for the entirety of the war. Lee's obedient belief in the invincibility of his command would result in unnecessary and irreplaceable casualties throughout the war. His insistence on rapid and unrelenting advancement of his forces in the face of devastating fire is evident in Captain James Nisbet's account of Gaines' Mill. Although that idea contributed towards much success in the early battles of the Civil War, the rapid deterioration of man power the Confederate Army faced implicated a different type of strategy for the war effort as the war wained into the dirt and mud of Virginia.

Captain Nisbet and the Twenty-First Georgia dwelled on their victory after Gaines' Mill. The Confederate Army's unrelenting pursuit of the enemy in the presence of an almost assured defeat, added to their confidence in combat. Captain James Nisbet coincidentally mirrored the tactical ideology of General Lee at Gaines' Mill and in doing so coincided with the new found identity of the Confederate

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<sup>114</sup> Gallagher, Gary W. et al, *The Richmond Campaign of 1862: The Peninsula & the Seven Days*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 2000), 44.

<sup>115</sup> Sears, *To The Gates of Richmond*, 202.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

Army under the budding General Lee. And so The Seven Days Battle ended with a Federal retreat from the outskirts of Richmond. An all but assured victory for the Union Army slipped away from grasps of the determined Federal soldiers. As for their unrelenting foe, the Confederate Army found their commander in General Robert E. Lee. The Virginian now set his army's sights upon the North, where war would finally be felt by the Union states. However another Federal army blocked the Confederate Army's advance northbound, as Major Rufus Dawes and the Sixth Wisconsin prepared for their first test in combat.

### Chapter 6: The Battle of Brawner Farm

The failure of the Peninsula Campaign devastated General George McClellan. So much so that the general stood idly in an infantile fit of reproach. Finding it impossible to compel the sulking general to advance his massive army, President Abraham Lincoln called for a new army to be raised. The Army of Virginia, made up of the remnants of units destroyed by General “Stonewall” Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley Campaign months before, random units collected from isolated service around central Virginia and many green soldiers that formed the defensive guard around Washington D.C. The new army would be led by General John Pope. Pope, a successful commander was poached from the western theater, where he led the capture of Island No. 10 in the Mississippi River. However with many flaws both tactically and personality-wise, Pope was doomed from the start. Unfortunately for the pompous Pope, General Robert E. Lee was a step ahead at almost every move. Lee, ultimately concerned that Pope and McClellan would concentrate their forces if given the chance; advanced towards Pope’s front on August 9. A battle ensued as Pope was forced to withdraw. Cedar Mountain, fought at ninety-plus degree temperatures, foreshadowed the month ahead and especially hot fighting to come.

Following victory at Cedar Mountain, General Robert E. Lee was no longer concerned with the possibility of General John Pope and General George B. McClellan’s armies linking up in Virginia. Seizing the initiative to place his army between the Federal capital and Pope’s Army, Lee marched for Manassas Junction. The rail hub held a massive reserve of Federal Army rations as well as horses and munitions. Exhausted after marching one hundred miles in three days, Captain James Cooper Nisbet and the Twenty-First Georgia reached Manassas Junction barely contested, yet exhausted.<sup>117</sup> After a light skirmish, the Two Twenty-Ones captured the junction and feasted upon rations intended for an entire army. Whatever they could not consume and carry was to be eliminated. “It nearly broke our hearts to destroy any of the needful food and clothing” Nisbet bemoaned, but “to see our half-starved men, tattered and barefoot, filling up on canned goods...as they strutted around in new shoes...was a very amusing and satisfying site.”<sup>118</sup> Pope’s Army, completely taken, turned to meet Lee in the vicinity of the old Bull Run

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<sup>117</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years On The Firing Line*, 135.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

battlefield. As Pope concentrated his lumbering forces to his immediate rear, Major Rufus Dawes and the Sixth Wisconsin now marched in the lead of the startled Federal Army.

On the evening of August 27, 1862, Major Rufus Dawes screamed above the sound of Confederate artillery for his men to “lie down.” Six rebel cannon pounded away at the Iron Brigade as they meandered towards Centerville, Virginia.<sup>119</sup> Dawes knew that “...discreet and respectful obeisance to a cannon ball is no indication of cowardice.”<sup>120</sup> The protection of his men was imperative at that moment. The Sixth Wisconsin had not yet seen combat yet and to be a casualty before the chance to prove oneself worth on the battlefield seemed a rather dull thought. Fortunately for the Midwesterners, the Confederate artillery’s aim was poor. The guns sent their shells harmlessly over the heads of the Federal’s taking cover on the banks of the road. General John Gibbon’s brigade could see the movement of Confederate units to the right of a heavily wooded lot. Undoubtedly the motion became more clear as the sun set over the hills. The Confederate forces who were shielded by their artillery finally advanced from their protection behind the dense wood-line. General Gibbon understood battle was certain and ordered his brigade to load their rifles.

General Gibbon ordered his only veteran regiment, the Second Wisconsin, forward. Only a year earlier at the Battle of First Bull Run, those men advance over similar ground only a few miles down the road. The rest of Gibbon’s Brigade laid in wait. Major Rufus Dawes watched with his men as the Second Wisconsin marched in a branded perfect order out of sight. General Gibbon stretched in the saddle to see his lead regiment step off. The woods before the Second Wisconsin were crawling with Confederates. The veterans of the Second Wisconsin halted and waited for their foe to organize their advance. The ranks of the Second Wisconsin began shooting insults and curses toward the Confederate ranks. The eagerness of impending uncertainty was agonizing for the soldier. A final “come on God Damn you” was muttered from someone as the ranks quieted.<sup>121</sup> The unmistakable sound of rifle fire filled the air as the rest of Gibbon’s brigade laid in the road. The general could not see a thing but knew he must send support to the Second Wisconsin. General Gibbon snapped to the Nineteenth Indiana orders to reenforce the Second

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<sup>119</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*.60. Gaff, Alan D. “*Iron Brigade at Brawner Farm*,” (Dayton: Morningside House INC, 1985), 62. Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run*, 169.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

Wisconsin's flank. Major Rufus Dawes observed the Indianians as they advanced at the double "...as if to save a friend in peril." It was six o'clock pm as the sun began to set.<sup>122</sup>

Major Rufus Dawes and the Sixth Wisconsin waited impatiently to be sent into the action. The major knew the regiment would be off soon enough. Behind the regiment Captain John Campbell's Battery B drove towards a fence line to the right. Major Dawes ordered some of his men to tear down the fence and escort the cherished guns through the opening.<sup>123</sup> The Federal artillery opened up on the Confederate position and Major Dawes took upon the moment to guide his "...sturdy old mare" amongst the men and offered his best encouragement.<sup>124</sup> The anticipation was unbearable but soon an aid to General Gibbon found the ranks of the Sixth Wisconsin. The frantic man shouted that "the Second was being slaughtered" and ordered Colonel Lysander Cutler to advance his regiment to their aid.<sup>125</sup>

Cutler passed on the orders to his junior officers to advance their companies. The nervous but confident Midwesterners began to advance forward. The Sixth Wisconsin felt the importance of the impending engagement and paired with the uncertainty of what may happen, plagued the ranks of the volunteers and leaders alike. Training and drilling was implemented for this reason alone. Replacing the stress of impending battle and forming it into drill kept the minds of the soldier clear and on the idea of something other than doom. Major Dawes advanced to the front of his ranks but his mount spooked at the sound of the artillery exploding to their front. Losing control of his steed, the mount steered him over a rail fence to the regiment's front. The beast launched itself over all in one leap and safely landed on the other side with Dawes still remarkably attached to his saddle. The men cheered the unintended action and loosened the advancing lines up in spirit.<sup>126</sup>

The Sixth Wisconsin moved swiftly past Campbell's guns at the double-quick. With the woods to their left, a hill to their front masked the regiment's movement for the moment. The setting sun silhouetted the ranks of soldiers. Flashes from the rifles of the Second and Seventh Wisconsin lit up the woods to

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<sup>122</sup> Gaff, *Iron Brigade at Brawner Farm*, 62.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>124</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*. 61.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

their left.<sup>127</sup> Major Dawes steadied his line, the crest of a hill was a few yards away. Upon reaching it the Sixth Wisconsin finally observed a dry stream bed covered by a thin contour of trees to their front. Beyond that, a slightly rising field with a decaying rail fence posted defiantly in the center. The Confederate lines began to advance for the fence line. The Sixth Wisconsin was fortunate enough to have some cover in that dried stream bed. The advancing Confederates were not so entitled to that fortune.

Colonel Cutler, Lt. Colonel Bragg, and Major Dawes continued to push their line towards the shelter of the dried creek bed. Upon reaching it, the Confederates did not hesitate a moment and delivered a volley into the Federal ranks. The volley was high and the rounds smacked into the trees and fence posts to the Sixth's front.<sup>128</sup> Colonel Lysander Cutler ordered a halt to his advancing regiment. Doing as junior officers should, Major Dawes repeated the order to his left wing. The Seventh Wisconsin advanced into a position nearly one hundred yards away from the left of the Sixth Wisconsin. Immediately a rapidly approaching wave of Confederates surged out of the woods to their immediate front and stifled the Seventh's progress. Major Dawes could see that their brothers were dropping in heaps and corrected his vision to the battle to his front.<sup>129</sup> Colonel Cutler ordered the Sixth Wisconsin to fire. Dawes and the other junior officers repeated his orders at their loudest. The Midwesterners wasted no time and volleyed into the pursuing Confederate lines. Strangely unperturbed, the Confederate line shuttered but continued forward with a high-pitched shriek. Major Dawes ordered his men to lay to prone the ground. Standing up to the advancing Confederate tide only added to the causality lists.

Alabamians, Carolinians, and Georgians all surged together and forward towards the deteriorating rail fence to their front. Upon reaching the center of the field, Captain James Nisbet and his company used what was left of the fence as cover. Two Federal regiments to the Two Twenty-Ones front and left caught sight of the Confederate charge and obliquely aimed a most devastating volley into the ranks.<sup>130</sup> Nisbet had been in this situation before, only months before. This time he was not in command and in this

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<sup>127</sup> From Dawes position, he could not see the Nineteenth Indiana. They were positioned to the extreme left and covered by hilly terrain.

<sup>128</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*. 61-62.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> The charge of the Twenty-First North Carolina and Twenty-First Georgia drew the fire from Major Rufus Dawes' left wing of the Sixth Wisconsin, along with the entirety of the Fifty-Sixth Pennsylvania and the right wing of the Seventy-Sixth New York. The crossfire almost decimated both Confederate regiments before a retreat could be ordered.

position only a wooden rail covered his extremities.<sup>131</sup> The Twenty-First Georgia was pinned in a devastating fire. The men were ravaged by a devastating fire from the Federal's. For Captain Nisbet, there would be no leading by example that evening.

For forty minutes, the Twelfth Alabama, Fifteenth Alabama, and the Two Twenty-Ones fired into the Sixth Wisconsin and the Fifty-Sixth Pennsylvania.<sup>132</sup> Both sides showed no order but rather demonstrated a mass of bloodied humanity. Major Dawes called the opposing lines who were engaged less than fifty yards apart "two crowds."<sup>133</sup> All recognition of Hardee's tactics, the staple of military command in that day, became an inconvenience for the struggling battle lines, and quickly became disregarded on Brawner Farm. Warfare had begun to change as the Civil War progressed. The realization of the disastrous impact of such outdated tactics became evident as absurd amounts of casualties lined the battlefields. However, the two forces engaged at Brawner Farm in that moment had become all too absorbed with one another. Each side refused to be bested by the other, and to each stubborn opposing forces, the consequences of holding a firing line in the open would prove extremely severe as the battle concluded at sundown.

The Confederate charge to the center of Brawner's field, in retrospect, was nothing but foolish. The brigade commander, General Issac Trimble, accustomed to quick advances in battle, pushed his Two Twenty-Ones too far forward. As a result, both were annihilated by the Sixth Wisconsin and the Fifty-Sixth Pennsylvania.<sup>134</sup> Except that for Trimble's brigade, it was customary for their foe to turn-tail and evacuate the field after an aggressive advance. Besides the Battle of Gaines' Mill, Trimble's Brigade had not been challenged as severely as they were at Brawner Farm. The impact of the professionalism of the Sixth Wisconsin's ability in battle, served Trimble's men their first loss, and a costly one at that. The war was changing, and the Federal's ability to execute in battle was as well.

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<sup>131</sup> Thomas, *History of the Doles-Cook Brigade*. 334.

<sup>132</sup> Gaff, *Iron Brigade at Brawner Farm*. 89.

<sup>133</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*. 62.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

Captain James Nisbet recalled almost nothing of the Battle of Brawner Farm. This is rather strange solely because he actively recorded the events of every action he partook in, even down to the small skirmishes. Nisbet only managed to record a single sentence recounting the battle: “Braver men never went into battle.”<sup>135</sup> One could surmise that the shame of his regiment losing 315 of its 350 effectives caused that irregular laps in memory.<sup>136</sup> Or it could be that he just did not want to “dwell” on the slaughter of his beloved regiment. Nevertheless, he indeed was there, and he did lead his company that evening.

Major Rufus Dawes, strode his horse back and forth as darkness fell. The overzealous beast hopping and dodging the rodent holes on its own accord.<sup>137</sup> Dawes searched for the next move. He understood now, after the recent experience of intense Confederate rifle fire, that to stand idol was foolish and costly. Looking to his right towards the regimental colors, Colonel Cutler sat atop his horse, unfazed at the intense fire. Major Dawes approached his seemingly annoyed Colonel and without acknowledgement of his major, Cutler called out to Major Dawes “our men are giving ground on the left, Major.”<sup>138</sup> Major Dawes shook off the unsure jab by the old colonel. But before Dawes could request orders, Cutler “gave a convulsive start and clapped his hand on his leg.”<sup>139</sup> Simultaneously, Cutler’s mount was hit by a ball. Knowing the consequence of the well-aimed Confederate fire, Major Dawes immediately galloped to Lt. Colonel Bragg to inform him he had command of the regiment. The small but aggressive Bragg immediately ordered an advance. The Federal group began to shuffle forward and Major Dawes, in the midst of his men once again, pushed his mount ahead, all the while shouting all the encouragement he could muster.<sup>140</sup>

The Sixth Wisconsin and the Fifty-Sixth Pennsylvania advanced frightfully too close to the intermingled Confederate regiments. Captain Nisbet and the Twenty-First Georgia opened up on the left flank of the Sixth Wisconsin as well as to the front for the Fifty-Sixth Pennsylvania. The fire from the confused Confederate units was however slackening. Proving too much for the depleted Twenty-first

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<sup>135</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years On The Firing Line*, 140.

<sup>136</sup> Thomas, *History of the Doles-Cook Brigade*, 334.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Gaff, *Iron Brigade at Brawner Farm*. 87.

Georgia, the regiment's commander, Major Glover had enough. The order to withdraw was given, but only after a parting volley from the Federal's seemingly passed clean-through the ranks of the fledgling Confederates.<sup>141</sup> The Twenty-First Georgia had finally left a battlefield in defeat.

A retreating Confederate volley staggered the advancing Federals. Though they steadied themselves against the final fire, Lt. Colonel Bragg ordered a withdraw, but on the regiment's terms and in what became a patented step-by-step maneuver of the brigade.<sup>142</sup> The flashes of rifle fire gave way to the uncomfortable sounds of the wounded and dying. The Sixth Wisconsin had finally participated in its first battle. In an odd case, it may be said that they were fortunate to experienced such a fierce fight. All other conflicts might seem more manageable to the veterans of the Gibbon's Brigade henceforth. The Sixth Wisconsin withdrew from the hotly contested field of battle, methodically. Major Rufus Dawes sorted through his command and rallied together all he could find of his command. At 9 o'clock the battle had mercifully concluded. Three cheers were ordered by Lt. Colonel Bragg. The shouts echoed through the woodlot between the cries of the wounded and dying, only to be acknowledged with no rebuttal by the Confederates.<sup>143</sup>

Through often forgotten, the Battle of Brawner Farm proved to be a ferocious engagement. Unfortunately, the action would be outdone in the next few days, as General John Pope's Army of Virginia was utterly routed and slaughtered a few miles down the road. For Major Rufus Dawes and the Sixth Wisconsin, the engagement proved to be humbling. The Midwesterners lived up to the status of their U.S. Regulars' uniform and handled themselves to perfection in the face of nearly insurmountable odds. Major Dawes exercised his command to the best of his ability, steadying and supporting his wing of the regiment coolly and competently. Dawes was in the thick of the fighting and shared the same dangers that his companies faced. The two men Dawes looked up to the most, Colonel Cutler and Lt. Colonel Bragg, handled themselves wonderfully. Exercising good decision making as well as keeping a constant report with their officers. Dawes observed both men constantly during the fight, mimicking their movements as well as psychically partaking in the desperate fight. As the Sixth Wisconsin marched away

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<sup>141</sup> Thomas, *History of the Doles-Cook Brigade*, 334.

<sup>142</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*. 63.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64.

from the battlefield, Major Dawes could not help but feel for his exhausted and wounded men. Seeing one of his captains fall to the ground on the march towards Pope's lines, Dawes leapt from his mount and assisted the man into the saddle. He continued to give his horse up to the wounded until he reached Pope's converging army.<sup>144</sup>

The Sixth's Manassas nightmare was not over. The following three days, the unit was plagued by Confederate sharpshooters, as well as a near constant artillery barrage. To add to their collective discomfort, General Fitz John Porter's V Corps, en route their own rude awakening, taunted Gibbon's exhausted brigade. "We are going to show you straw-feet how to fight" they shouted as they shuffled by.<sup>145</sup> Unknown to them, the unit, Duryea's Zouaves, were routed in only minutes within the following hour. As a soldier in the Sixth Wisconsin teased, the "slack in their baggy pantaloons" were let out.<sup>146</sup> The Sixth Wisconsin found themselves a rear-guard once again, as General James Longstreet's massive and crushing counter attack rolled up the Union left flank. As the gray wave rolled into the Union flank the exhausted Midwesterners ran for cover. "I shouted to my men to 'tree'," Dawes recalled. "I jumped behind a small tree myself, where I must have shrunk to the dimension of a wafer."<sup>147</sup> Major Dawes exercised the idea of living to fight another day. The Sixth would survive the onslaught, but only to be deployed in a few weeks into some of the most intense fighting of the war.

Captain James Nisbet's regiment was ruined. The Twenty-First Georgia was accustomed to victory, but The Valley, The Seven Days, Manassas Junction all now seemed a distant memory to the demoralized ranks of Georgians. The 242 men that filled the ranks of the Twenty-First Georgia, were now whittled down to 69 effectives.<sup>148</sup> Unfortunately Nisbet's ideas of the battle were left unrecorded, but a good soldier, which he certainly was, learned from a disastrous outcome. Cover was the key to battle and the former experience suggests that it was necessary for victory. Advancing into the face of an opponent was a bygone tactic. Critically thinking of the repercussions of an advance served in a command's best

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<sup>144</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*. 64.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>148</sup> Allen, et al, *Campaigning With "Old Stonewall,"* 149.

interest. The Federals had fight in them now, their demeanor in battle was different and they were not to be pushed around.

### Chapter 7: The Battle of South Mountain

Slowly, the Army of the Potomac under General George McClellan moved from Eastern Virginia into Maryland. Lee, his army thriving off of his recent victory, crossed into Maryland as well, sating the vast and fruitful farmlands to feed his exhausted but victorious army. The idea that the citizens of Maryland assisting in the Confederate war effort, entertained the ragged army. However, this was not the case for the Confederates. Many citizens took to ignoring the distasteful looking Rebels. Others jeered them as the disgustingly ragged army entered Frederick, Maryland on September 10. Disregarding the hostile atmosphere, Lee set out to capture the Federal garrisons at Martinsburg and Harpers Ferry.<sup>149</sup> Expecting these strongholds to withdraw, Lee would march in and sack its contents for his struggling army. This would not happen as planned. General Henry Halleck ordered the garrisons to hold out to a man. Lee split his army in order to execute his plans. A tactic that can elude to a military disaster and inevitably led towards a botched campaign from the start.<sup>150</sup> As General “Stonewall” Jackson encircled Harpers Ferry and trained his artillery on the small Federal force within, the Army of the Potomac caught General Robert E. Lee with his army scattered about Western Maryland. The Federal Army obliged to the fact that Lee’s ultimate plan was carelessly lost by an aid and discovered lying under a tree by Federal soldiers, outside Fredrick, Maryland. On September 15, 1862, Major Rufus Dawes and the Sixth Wisconsin found General Robert E. Lee’s Confederate Army in position above Turner’s Gap, Maryland.

The Sixth Wisconsin laid in line of battle before a sloping hill overlooking South Mountain. The smoke from the developing battle before them obscured the vision of the soldiers. It had been nearly an hour since Gibbon’s Brigade had been called to the front.<sup>151</sup> The anticipation and the feeling of the uncertainty began its familiar grab at regiment as the Federal artillery blasted away at the mountain-side. Major Rufus Dawes found himself second in-command of the Sixth Wisconsin. Colonel Lysander Cutler, still nursing his Brawner Farm wound, remained out of commission. Lieutenant Colonel Edward Bragg replaced Cutler as the regimental commander for the impending battle. Major Dawes did not mind the change in command. He was proud of his good friend getting the chance to lead the regiment into combat.

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<sup>149</sup> D. Scott Hartwig, “To Antietam Creek,” *Antietam Commemorative Issue*, September, 2002, 8-11. Nisbet, *Four Years On The Firing Line*, 149.

<sup>150</sup> Hartwig, “To Antietam Creek,” 8-11.

<sup>151</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*, 80.

The good regiment deserved an aggressive commander, and the small and short-fused Bragg was certainly a pushy one. The sun was setting behind the mountain, but the battle still raged ahead.<sup>152</sup> Orders finally reached Colonel Bragg to advance. The regiment realized it was to be a familiar twilight fight. However, this time the entire Union Army would be viewing them ascend the slope into battle.<sup>153</sup>

For the past half hour, the Seventh Wisconsin and the Nineteenth Indiana had been battling along the Confederates positioned behind a stonewall on the gap's mountain side. The heavy woods sabotaged the regiments rapid advance, and in turn, the Sixth Wisconsin had been forced into an unconventional line of battle. As Dawes explained, the regiment moved "Indian style" towards the wall.<sup>154</sup> Major Dawes, in command of the right wing of the Sixth Wisconsin, rolled his command up along to the flank of the Seventh Wisconsin, drawing cheers from their warn Midwestern brethren.<sup>155</sup> The fire from the concealed Confederate position ravaged the foliage around the regiment. Lt. Colonel Bragg ordered Major Dawes to draw the Confederate fire away from the Seventh Wisconsin. The major issued the orders of "attention, right wing, ready, right oblique, aim, fire, load at will, load."<sup>156</sup> Major Dawes kept along side his firing line as the Confederate fire shifted to their front. However, the regiment became stalemated in their position, and Lt. Colonel Bragg met Major Dawes decided to meet in conference at the the regimental colors. A plan was devised. Dawes' right wing was to remain where it was. Bragg would shuffle his left wing behind Major Dawes' right wing and then leap-frog each other after every volley.<sup>157</sup> The chemistry between the two commanders worked into a wondrous reaction. The Sixth Wisconsin rapidly executed the orders until reaching within forty yards of the Confederate position at the stonewall, but the advance stalled once more, and Bragg and Dawes decided to consult each other about the situation. The two young officers decided that Bragg's left would use Dawes' right as a screen in order to develop the flank of the Confederate position. The impending dusk would mask their maneuvers as well. The order again was executed exactly as discussed. Bragg gained his position upon the Confederate flank and Dawes

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<sup>152</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*, 80.

<sup>153</sup> Nolan, *The Iron Brigade*, 121.

<sup>154</sup> Advancing staggered and not in line of battle. *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.* *Ibid.*, 125-126.

analogously exacted his part. The Sixth Wisconsin poured a withering fire into the Confederate flank.<sup>158</sup> The fire being so great from the Sixth Wisconsin, Major Dawes noticed the rifles fouling. Unfortunately, ammunition began to dwindle in the ranks and only added in problems. Major Dawes gave the order to pick the dead and wounded of cartridges.<sup>159</sup> But this did not prove to be sufficient enough to sustain a continuous fire. Dawes sent an orderly down the slope to request more rounds, but the man returned empty handed. General Gibbon could do nothing but order his exhausted brigade to hold their position with the bayonet.<sup>160</sup>

That night, the Sixth Wisconsin rested on their fouled rifles. The brigade refused to relinquish their hard fought ground. In their second battle, Gibbon's Brigade fought as veterans. The ability to concentrate their fire, execute orders in the heat of combat, and withstand enemy volleys were characteristics that were difficult to teach, train and develop, let alone execute as an inexperienced volunteer unit. This can be attributed to the skill of their junior officers' direction in combat. At Turner's Gap, Lt. Colonel Bragg and Major Dawes discovered a shared bond between each other. Not only were they friends as well as respectful subordinates, the ability to respect each other in combat only benefited the entire unit all together. In an army full of ego and skepticism between its officers, these rare junior officers were able to confide in each other that each would do their duty no matter the circumstances. The greater good of the regiment would be the command's prerogative. To lose their incredible veterans needlessly was not an option. The ninety-two casualties accumulated on the mountain side certainly would sting the regiment, but we can note if it were not for its attentive junior officers, the casualty rate could have been extraordinary high that day.<sup>161</sup>

Major Rufus Dawes and the Sixth Wisconsin marched down the slopes of South Mountain the next day. They marched to a clearing and finally had their muted longed-for coffee. Regiments passed the veterans and cheered them. Too exhausted, many ignored acclaim but sat and drank their coffee, but with a new felt pride.<sup>162</sup> Within the next hour, the Federal Army was on the march again. The First Brigade, 1st

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<sup>158</sup> Nolan, *The Iron Brigade*, 126-127.

<sup>159</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*, 83.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

Division, I Corps led by General “Fighting Joe” Hooker crawled along the dusty road. The night before, General Hooker in a meeting with General McClellan, was astonished after hearing him remark that his Midwesterners fought like an “Iron Brigade.” “Fighting Joe,” accustomed to nicknames and the glory bestowed by them, snatched the name for the pride of his I Corps.<sup>163</sup>

After a week of constant marching, Gibbon’s “Iron Brigade” took up a position before a rich farmstead. The men began to kindle their coffee fires, but those were soon stomped out by overly-aggressive sergeants. Rain began to fall, but many of the unit did not even care nor notice. Federal pickets attempted to disrupt as much of the contested army’s sleep as they could. The heavy feeling of a great battle crept over the Maryland countryside once again.

Two days before, Captain James Cooper Nisbet had spent his time around Harpers Ferry, Virginia watching General “Stonewall” Jackson’s artillery shell the tranquil town to pieces. The Twenty-First Georgia reluctantly advanced towards the town but fortunately for the spent men, saw no action. The white flag was raised before the Trimble’s brigade was engaged. Almost immediately, orders came down the line for the Georgians to fall in. The fetid and depleted Twenty-First Georgia started off the march as a dragging column but in high spirits. Though only number around eighty effectives, the regiment was more than ready to redeem their Second Manassas showing. But the unit knew nothing of the seriousness of the situation down the road. General Lee, stunned at the situation that developed around South Mountain, ordered his split forces to converge around a small farming town. With their backs against the Potomac River and his forces now trickling in from all angles, Lee was determined to stand firm and salvage his failing invasion of Maryland. Captain Nisbet and the Twenty-First Georgia reached their intended position and laid in an open field of dirt. The regiment was soundly secured by rolling hills, limestone outcroppings and a grand view of a huge cornfield. To the regiment’s right was a farmhouse that was set ablaze by Confederate pickets, and to the Georgian’s immediate front, a wooded glen. Battle was imminent.

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<sup>163</sup> Nolan, *The Iron Brigade*, 130.

### Chapter 8: The Battle of Antietam

Captain James Cooper Nisbet and the Twenty-First Georgia Infantry awoke on the morning of September 17, 1862 to the sounds of Federal rifle fire to their front. Only one week away from his twenty-third birthday, Nisbet had been campaigning as a junior officer in the Twenty-First Georgia for nearly six months straight, a veteran of some of the most vicious combat of the war. The command of the Georgians had been passed to him during the most difficult combat situations, and he and the Twenty-First Georgia succeeded in completing their tasks as soldiers. At dawn, Federal artillery began shelling the exposed Confederate positions posted around the fields and orchards beyond Sharpsburg. Confederate batteries did their best to rebuttal but the concussion of the heavy ordinance, both Federal and Confederate, shook both armies unmercifully. Caught between countless dueling batteries and out in the open with little protection from the Federal and Confederate ordinance, Captain Nisbet and the other officers of the Twenty-First Georgia ordered their companies to lay down behind any cover they could find.<sup>164</sup>

The night before on September 16, General Issac Trimble's Brigade had been deployed in the fields and farm lane of the Mumma Farm. Two hundred yards ahead of Trimble's position on that farm, lay what the locals called the East Woods. The thin woodlot did not conceal the Federals as they pushed out and into the open field towards the Georgian position. At 5:45am, the Federals advanced rapidly towards Captain Nisbet's vulnerable position behind a rail fence. Though exposed, some of the Georgians were fortunate enough to find low limestone outcroppings, which offered some shelter from the shelling.<sup>165</sup> Major Thomas Glover, commanding the Twenty-First Georgia, ordered the Georgians to commence firing on the advancing Federals. The Federal brigade Trimble's men were up against, were General Truman Seymour's vaunted Pennsylvania Bucktails. General Seymour had equipped his regiments with breechloading Sharps rifles, which created a severe and constant fire that the Georgians struggled in replicating.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Sears, Stephan W. *The Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983), 184.

<sup>165</sup> Sears, *The Landscape Turned Red*, 184.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

Captain Nisbet crouched along his company, directing fire and shouting encouragement to his men as they responded in vain to the seemingly continuous Federal fire. Nisbet drew up alongside to a peculiar man on the regiment's firing line. The captain huddled close by and offered encouragement to the soldier but also warned him to keep covered.<sup>167</sup> Regrettably, Nisbet's warnings went unheard as the man was soon a casualty to the intense Federal rifle fire. Captain Nisbet called for a stretcher, shouldered the man's rifle, and contrary to junior officer behavior tried to exhaust the man's remaining rounds. He attempted to lead by example but all the while made sure his men kept up their fire, multitasking as a rifleman and officer. By joining the firing line, a junior officer immediately attracted the trust of their men. This demonstrated that the junior officer was willing to excuse orders along side the common soldier.<sup>168</sup> The importance of a soldier's trust within the junior officer reserve was critical to the functionality of a Civil War unit. Attention to the details of battle was also imperative to the survival of a unit, as the Sharps rifles that Seymour's Federals held used up copious amounts of ammunition. Consequently, Seymour's Brigade was forced to exit the field only after a short demonstration. With no orders to withdraw, the Georgians braced themselves again for the redeployment of the Federals to their front. Fatigued but determined to hold the position on the Mumma Farm, Captain Nisbet felt the fight with Seymour's Brigade had lasted three-hours, though it was only 6:00 am.<sup>169</sup>

Major Rufus Dawes, a veteran of two months of heavy combat, knew his regiment's ability and expected extreme competence from his men in combat. General Joseph Hooker's I Corps' initial attacks towards the Dunker Church had stalled. The Iron Brigade stepped into position along side the Joseph Poffenberger Farm. Confederate artillery fire skipped into the ranks and flank of the Midwestern brigade, but they remained at attention. Dawes knew the men had complete trust in their commanders, right down to the junior officers. The only thing to hold any concern over was ones survival. Orders to advance reached the Sixth Wisconsin and the Iron Brigade stepped off in columns of division with Major Dawes and Sixth Wisconsin in the lead. To attest to the severity of the artillery fire, a shot exploded amidst front

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<sup>167</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years On The Firing Line*, 152.

<sup>168</sup> Allen, et al, *Campaigning With "Old Stonewall,"* 159. Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Sears, *The Landscape Turned Red* 184. Ibid, 152. Captain Nisbet records this fight lasted "In the course of two to three hours." In reality, the fight with Seymour's Brigade lasted about fifteen minutes.

ranks of the Sixth Wisconsin, killing and wounding eleven of the Midwesterners.<sup>170</sup> However, the collective idea of professionalism railed the stunned lines as the regiment closed-up ranks and advanced in good order.<sup>171</sup> The proficiency of its soldiers and officers prove to be indispensable for the brigade that morning. Absorbing shot and shell, the Sixth Wisconsin maneuvered through a shallow strip of woods and deployed into a line of battle. Watches read 6:15 am.

The smoke from the rifles and countless Federal and Confederate guns clouded the area around the East Woods and the Mumma Farm. General Truman Seymour's Brigade did not renew their attack on General Issac Trimble's Brigade, leaving Captain James Nisbet and the Twenty-First Georgia time to recuperate. Major Thomas Glover returned from a rendezvous with General Trimble's staff and informed the Twenty-First Georgia's junior officers that the regiment was to make a run for the fence line bordering the Smoketown Road to the left of their present position. The regiment had to oblique left, take up a position behind the fence that bordered the road and assist the fight in the cornfield beyond. Federal brigades were observed by the staff rapidly advancing through the trampled corn stalks. But before the order to advance to the Smoketown Road was to be arranged, Major Glover went down with a severe wound. Command of the Twenty-First Georgia once again fell into the hands of Captain James Nisbet at a critical moment in combat.<sup>172</sup>

Major Rufus Dawes looked on as Captain John Kellogg and Company I of the Sixth Wisconsin dashed for the Miller Farmhouse.<sup>173</sup> In order to press the advance of the Iron Brigade, the Confederate sharpshooters who had taken position inside the Miller's home, had to be driven back. Artillery fire still raked the halted column, as Company I sorted through the orchards and outbuildings of the farm. Major Dawes patiently waited for Kellogg's company to finish their work, but Lt. Colonel Edward Bragg, still in regimental command, grew irritated and ordered the right wing of the Sixth Wisconsin opposite the Hagerstown Pike. The movement left Major Dawes in charge of the Sixth's left wing. Upon completion of

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<sup>170</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*, 88. Nolan, *The Iron Brigade*, 137.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 88. *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years On The Firing Line*, 153.

<sup>173</sup> Carman, Ezra A. *The Maryland Campaign of September 1862, Ezra A. Carman's Definitive Study of the Union and Confederate Armies at Antietam, Edited by Joseph Pierro*, (New York, Taylor and Francis Group LLC. 2008), 221.

clearing the Miller homestead, Major Dawes ordered his group forward and through the farm, making sure to keep a tight hold to their flank along the Hagerstown Pike.

“As soon as we left the rock fence, our object was defined; the enemy, in the woods to our front, opened up on us.” Captain James Nisbet recalled as the Twenty-First Georgia broke for the Smoketown Road.<sup>174</sup> The remnants of Seymour’s Brigade to their right flank, along with a New York regiment to their front-right, caught the Georgians in the midst of their advance. The contesting Federals opened up a terrible fire into the Georgians. Nisbet, attempting to lead by example, was one of the first to attempt the dash. The captain felt a blow to his chest, and toppled over rails and into the road. Although sprawled out and unconscious, the Georgians followed his lead and scaled the fence into their new position along the Smoketown Road.<sup>175</sup> “I recovered my senses in a few minutes.” remembered Nisbet. The captain checked himself and found no blood but saw that his sword clasp had been badly dented by a ball. Recalling in his memoirs, Nisbet vouches that “you don’t hear the one that hits you.”<sup>176</sup> Many a soldier attested to Nisbet’s recollection of that day. Transitory to nearly being a casualty moments before, Nisbet scrambled over to the fence where his regiment held their new skirmish line.<sup>177</sup> It was here where Captain Nisbet found Lieutenant Blevins kneeling behind his company as they fired into a Federal regiment attempting to advance out of the Cornfield to their front. However, a round exiting the vortex, hit the junior officer in the shoulder. Captain Nisbet informed him where the field hospital was located and watched the young officer miraculously escaping death as he wandered incoherently to the rear.<sup>178</sup> As Nisbet attempted to assess the situation to his front, one of his captains crawled over to him and inquired if Lieutenant Blevins was well. But before the captain finished his thought, a round found his opened mouth. Nisbet scrambled over once again to another critically wounded junior officer in an attempt at triage, propped the officer's head up on a cartridge box.<sup>179</sup> While caring for his wounded, Captain Nisbet failed to recognize the situation. But Nisbet’s men fought well without close guidance and drove the Federal back into the woods

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<sup>174</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years On The Firing Line*, 153.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. The captain would survive the gruesome wound.

and corn. As Nisbet resumed his duty, of regimental command, his line began echoing the shouts of a retreating enemy.<sup>180</sup>

Major Rufus Dawes ordered his lead company through the Miller's garden fence. The men had difficulty pulling the fence down so orders were given to his good friend Captain Edwin Brown to take point and lead his company single-file through the gate. Captain Brown began to shout "Company E! on the right, by file into..." but was killed by a round through the open mouth before consummating the command.<sup>181</sup> Having no time to mourn his friend's death, Dawes urged his men on through the opening and recalled that "the men scrambled over the briars and flower beds in the garden" in an attempt to resurge the stalled advance.<sup>182</sup> The right of the Sixth Wisconsin under Lt. Colonel Bragg was still positioned across the pike when a powerful volley from the Confederates in the woods to their front staggered the Federal advance.<sup>183</sup> In thinking his own left wing in danger of being cut-off from the rest of the regiment, Major Dawes ordered his men slow the advance in order to reattach with the right of the regiment. Orders were given to lay down amongst the cornstalks.<sup>184</sup> Confederate rifle fire became increasingly intense and the artillery began the switch to canister, as the Iron Brigade aligned well into its effective range. Two officers posted next to Major Dawes were badly wounded by canister fire, as both wings of the Sixth Wisconsin ground to a halt. Sergeant-Major Howard Huntington found Dawes and informed him that Lt. Colonel Bragg immediately requested he meet him at the fence along the Hagerstown Pike.<sup>185</sup> Dawes made it to his commander but found Bragg clutching his side and bleeding profusely. Major Dawes immediately ordered two men to take his friend to the rear.

Finding himself in command of the regiment, Major Dawes observed the woods to the right of the Sixth Wisconsin's position at the turnpike. A group of daring Confederate officers on horseback presented themselves close to the regiment's front as the Sixth Wisconsin hugged the ground. Finding the scene

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<sup>180</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years On The Firing Line*, 154. The Twenty-First Georgia was drawing fire from Duryea's Federal brigade from the edge of the Cornfield as well as from a scattering of Federals reluctantly holding on to the edge of the East Woods to the Twenty-First's immediate right. The idea for Major Glover to shift his position is interesting to say the least. Being literally in the Smoketown Road, their right was exposed so much so that the Federals could shoot right down the command line and take out the officers as they directed the Georgians, which can attest to the two men Nisbet took care of as his men battled Duryea's Brigade.

<sup>181</sup> Carman, *The Maryland Campaign*, 221. Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*, 88.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 222. *Ibid.*

rather irritating, Major Dawes snatched a rifle from a soldier and upon resting it upon on one of the rail posts "...fired six shots at the group..." while his men handed him their muskets.<sup>186</sup> This scene undoubtedly stimulated regiment's fighting spirit and shook them out their complacency with the ground. The Sixth Wisconsin began responding to the Confederate volleys with a rapid fire of their own. Although Major Dawes was pleased with the rate of fire, the position of the regiment was exposed and an advance was necessary if any of his men were going to survive the battle. The rest of the Iron Brigade caught up to the Sixth Wisconsin and the entirety of the unit aligned. Major Dawes looked to his left and observed Lt. Colonel Thomas Allen of the Second Wisconsin motioning for Dawes to advance the Sixth Wisconsin. The two regiments began forward in an attempt to exit the cornfield.<sup>187</sup>

The Second and Sixth Wisconsin neared the edge of the cornfield. The Confederate fire was so intense that the men moved forward at a lean, as if against a strong wind. When reaching the edge of the cornfield, the advance stopped abruptly as a concealed line of Confederates drew up from the sloping ground and volleyed into the the Second and Sixth Wisconsin. Major Dawes infamously recalled that his "men, I cannot say fell; they were knocked out of the ranks by the dozens."<sup>188</sup> At this point in their enduring history, the Iron Brigade stood toe-to-toe with the finest regiments the Confederate Army could muster up. At Second Manassas the brigade refused to be moved. At South Mountain, the brigade refused to slow down their advance. The professionals of the steady unit seemingly automatically redressed following the volley and returned fire at the Confederate line. The lines of battle reminiscently morphed again into a disorganized group, much akin to formation Major Dawes recalled the unit fought as at Brawner Farm. The Fourteenth Brooklyn stepped into the ranks of the Sixth Wisconsin. Both regiments fired together into the Confederates who held their ground only thirty yards away from the cornfield.<sup>189</sup> Major Dawes viewed his regiment fighting frantically, and in an odd state. "A great hysterical excitement... and reckless regard of life..." took over skirmish line.<sup>190</sup> The intermingled Wisconsin and New York lines passed forward, seemingly out of necessity. The ranks held together only by the

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<sup>186</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*, 89.

<sup>187</sup> Carman, *The Maryland Campaign*, 223.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

toughness of the men and the idea of killing those who killed them. Major Dawes observed the Confederate fire had slackened and ordered his seemingly crazed regiment forward. The massed lines pushed the exhausted Confederates over the rail fence that bordered the Hagerstown Pike.<sup>191</sup> Dawes remained with his line, shouting and encouraging the great fire being dealt upon the shattered Confederates. Yet the Confederate line still had fight and staggered the reckless advance of the intermingled Federals. Major Dawes ordered a temporary withdraw back behind the rail fence in the cornfield to regroup his messed command.

From the cover of a piled up rail fence, the mass of confused units, both Federal and Confederate, continued to punish one another for their sin of existence. General John Gibbon somehow observed the stalled advance through the smoke and ordered two guns up and into the Hagerstown Pike. Stewart's Battery veered off west from the Hagerstown Pike to take advantage of the high ground along side the pike.<sup>192</sup> Coming into battery, the honorary members of the Iron Brigade shot into a rallied Confederate battle line leaving the West Woods, in an attempt to relieve the stranded Confederate units seeking cover along the pike's fence line. Unfortunately, assistance did not reach them. Federal sharpshooters, infantry, and now artillery all converged on the dejected Confederates. What was left of the Confederate firing line was routed as they broke and ran for the cover of the West Woods.

Major Dawes and Sixth Wisconsin bounded out of the cover in an attempt to converge their fire into the retreating Confederate line. "We all joined together, jumped over the fence, and again pushed out into the open field" Dawes recalled.<sup>193</sup> The strange state of Major Dawes command still remained in an odd way. The mental fatigue of death weighed heavily on the men in the ranks. Tears flowed freely down faces, and some laughed hysterically. A few were hit but did not fall, advancing yards on purely on adrenaline, shock, or denial before finally dropping or turning to the rear.<sup>194</sup> The Confederates frantically dove over the pike fences in an effort to escape the chaos, only to be blindsided by the Nineteenth Indiana and Seventh Wisconsin storming out of the West Woods. A fierce slaughter at the Hagerstown Pike ensued as both sides fought for their lives. Though just as soon as it begun, the Sixth Wisconsin, Fourteenth

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<sup>191</sup> Carman, *The Maryland Campaign*, 223.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>193</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*, 91.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

Brooklyn, Eighty Fourth New York, and the Second Wisconsin leaped to their feet and pushed up to nearly two hundred yards away from the Dunker Church.<sup>195</sup>

Confederate General John Bell Hood's Texas Brigade stampeded into the clover fields beyond the Dunker Church. The Texans and Georgians were lived after their breakfast was disturbed by the Iron Brigade's relentless advance. Unfortunately, Major Dawes noticed that the intermingled command's rifles were extensively fouled after rapid firing, thus preventing the Federals from sending the rabid Texans a volley before their withdrawal. Someone in the intermingled ranks yelled "now save who can!" and the Federal units sprinted to the shelter of the Cornfield.<sup>196</sup> Major Dawes led his regiment back into the flattened corn, but a spent ball hit his calve as he leapt over a fence. Ignoring the wound, Dawes kept his mind steady. Leaving the field was out of the question that morning.

The wrecked Federal advance attempted to rally in the center of Miller's Cornfield. The color guard of the Sixth Wisconsin especially felt the fury of Hood's Texans. Observing that a complete route of his unit very likely, Major Dawes grabbed the regimental flag and waved it defiantly, shouting rallying cries to any man that crossed him. Fully understanding that by grabbing the flag, death usually followed close by, Major Dawes decided that he would die right there rather than see his beloved men taken prisoner.<sup>197</sup> But, through the desperate situation, his men still rallied around the banner.

The guns that supported the Iron Brigade's advance began to fall silent. Horses and gunners were hit especially hard as the Confederate counterattack threatened to capture Gibbon's beloved bronze trophies. General Gibbon, a former artillerist had been assisting in sighting his Battery B Fourth U.S Artillery when he observed Major Dawes rallying his men close by.<sup>198</sup> Orders shouted at Dawes to save the guns drew the major's attention. Dawes and his small band ran for the road where the guns stood idol. "Let every man from Wisconsin follow me!" Major Dawes ordered.<sup>199</sup> Generals sighing artillery and majors were waving regimental flags. The Midwesterners were determined to hold onto their guns, which always served them well. The Texans advanced only forty yards away just as the guns unloaded a salvo

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<sup>195</sup> Lance J. Herdegen, "Into a Hornet's Nest," *Civil War Times*, February 2013. 33. Nolan, *The Iron Brigade*, 140.

<sup>196</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*, 91

<sup>197</sup> Nolan, *The Iron Brigade*, 141.

<sup>198</sup> Carman, *The Maryland Campaign*, 232-233.

<sup>199</sup> Herdegen, "Into a Hornet's Nest," 35.

that launched the top of the rail fence along with a company of Texans into the air.<sup>200</sup> Major Dawes looked around at his command, as thunderclaps of double canister stunned him. However, the major remained next to his men, determined to try to salvage the ground his men so valiantly held.<sup>201</sup>

Captain James Nisbet and the Twenty-First Georgia held onto the Smoketown Road desperately when Hood's Texans hauled up and over the exhausted regiment. Captain Nisbet made the decision to follow alongside the attack, and given the regiments propensity to rapidly move ordered an advance in an open-order. This maneuver allowed each man to advance towards cover in scattered formation.<sup>202</sup> Recalling the devastation the fire had been while leaping the fence along the road an hour before, Captain Nisbet ordered once the regiment reached the confines of the East Woods, that everyone, officers included, were to find a tree to draw the Federal fire. In Captain Nisbet's opinion, this would stall the advance of the enemy, and if necessary, let his men withdraw at their own desired pace. Nisbet had learned that "discretion is the better part of valor" in combat, as he understood.<sup>203</sup> To lead recklessly would not win the war and only cost you lives.

The Twenty-First Georgia entered the East Woods with the Fourth Alabama on their left and the Fifth Texas on their right.<sup>204</sup> General Joseph Mansfield's Federal XII Corps sluggishly moved into position to the Confederate front at a piecemeal rate. Mansfield's green troops hardly deployed into a line of battle when Captain Nisbet ordered his veteran regiment to fire at will. The precise fire, unleashed by Nisbet's staggered regiment positioned behind trees and neatly stacked wood, completely stalled the Federal advance. Nisbet recalls that in a such a calm manor, the Georgians were free to pick their targets and enact their revenge upon the raw Federal formations.<sup>205</sup> It was 8:30 am, when the Twenty-First Georgia finally withdrew after General John Bell Hood's Texas Brigade's advance was routed.<sup>206</sup> Captain James Nisbet ordered the retreat of his regiment, and sprinting as fast as they could across the hard-fought ground they previously occupied reached safety around the Dunker Church. The Twenty-First Georgia

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<sup>200</sup> Nolan, *The Iron Brigade*, 141.

<sup>201</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*, 91.

<sup>202</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years On The Firing Line*, 154.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Susannah J. Ural, "Fighting Too Fast," *Civil War Times*, December 2017. 39.

<sup>205</sup> Allen, et al, *Campaigning With "Old Stonewall,"* 159-160.

<sup>206</sup> Ural, "Fighting Too Fast," 40.

had been in constant combat for nearly four hours. Though Captain James Nisbet acted superbly as interim commander of the Twenty-First Georgia, he could not prevent the seventy-one casualties that the bloodiest day had wrought upon the already withered unit.<sup>207</sup> North of the Dunker Church, the Sixth Wisconsin and the Iron Brigade held on to General John Gibbon's guns. Major Rufus Dawes and what was left of his inherited command had reached the apex of exhaustion. Behind the cover the North Woods, the Midwesterners attempted to figure their losses. Of its 314 effectives, only 162 rallied at the end of the day on September 17.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Allen, et al, *Campaigning With "Old Stonewall,"* 160.

<sup>208</sup> Nolan, *The Iron Brigade*, 142.

### Chapter 9: Conclusion

The Battle of Antietam provided an utterly demoralizing outcome for both Union and Confederate armies. Though President Abraham Lincoln used the tactical draw as a platform to release the Emancipation Proclamation, the state of many of the combatants were far too enervated to comprehend the political importance at the moment. To describe the soldier's physical state as worn out after Antietam is an understatement. Major Rufus Dawes identifies the environment of the Sixth Wisconsin as "...in a condition of exhaustion" as well as "...in very bad condition for active service."<sup>209</sup> According to Dawes, the regiment had been the target of enemy fire for eleven straight days before the climactic battle at Antietam Creek.<sup>210</sup> Not only did battle demand a tax on the soldier's physical stability, but demanded the soldier's mental sanity as well. Major Dawes suffered from migraine headaches for weeks after the battle.<sup>211</sup> The regiment was in a state of gloom and despair after witnessing the devastation while advancing through Miller's Cornfield, which undoubtedly added to Dawes' and countless other participants pain.

Captain James Nisbet was in a similar way. As what was left of the Twenty-First Georgia regrouped around Dunker Church, the adrenaline depleted in the young captain. Nisbet collapsed into a state of nausea.<sup>212</sup> The painful bruising of his solar plexus was too much for him to bear any longer. As he involuntarily curled up into fetal-position, Nisbet's friend Bill Stewart from the Sixth Georgia ran up to the vulnerable junior officer. Stewart loosened Nisbet's essentials in an effort to comfort the captain. In doing so, a flattened round fell from Nisbet's sword clasp.<sup>213</sup> Later that night, Captain Nisbet made his way to a field hospital a few miles away from Sharpsburg at Shepperdstown. Through he was unfit for duty, Nisbet limped around searching for his wounded comrades. Upon finding them, he encouraged them with well wishes.<sup>214</sup> At the makeshift hospital, Nisbet came across the soldier whom he requisitioned the rifle from along the Smoketown Road fence. The Captain was amused to see that the man was fine, despite being shot through the abdomen. Another surprise bestowed Nisbet when he found the poor captain who

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<sup>209</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*, 98,102.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>212</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years On The Firing Line*, 161.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

suffered that horrible head wound, alive but painfully swollen. Both of Nisbet's men would survive their gruesome wounds.<sup>215</sup> Captain Nisbet continued to make rounds, checking on his wounded men and assisting when he could, doing his duty as he struggled to stay up-right.

The Summer of 1862 passed by quickly for the embattled Americans. The winter mixture of navy and sky-blue overcoats were thrown on as the new Army of the Potomac commander, General Ambrose Burnside, waited incessantly on the banks of the Rappahannock River, across from Fredericksburg, Virginia. For Major Rufus Dawes, impending battle approached the Iron Brigade again, and the men were less than enthused about the prospect. The Antietam fog still lingered over the brigade. Through most of the Sixth Wisconsin's wounded officer corps returned for duty, they were not at all healthy or fit. The frigid temperature did not help to comfort the still raw wounds many held. A new addition to the brigade came in form of a rather obnoxious but entertaining regiment of Michiganders. The Twenty-Fourth Michigan was overly-eager to engage in battle. Not yet understanding the Army's lack of effort in food quality or distribution, the Twenty-Fourth Michigan chanted "Bread!" at the top of their lungs all the way to Fredericksburg. Much to the veterans of the brigade amusement, they did not show a sign of fatigue in doing so.<sup>216</sup> Upon arrival at Fredericksburg, the rest of the brigade was more than happy to let them go in and cover themselves with all the glory they could possibly absorb.<sup>217</sup>

On December 13, 1862 Major Rufus Dawes and the Sixth Wisconsin watched as the Twenty-Fourth Michigan rapidly cleared a wooded area to the brigade's left. The entirety of the Iron Brigade stepped off towards the Confederate guns which bristled the heights beyond their position. Major Rufus Dawes systematically led his wing as Confederate artillery shelled the ground ahead of the regiment. The Confederate ordnance began to hit too close to the fatigued battle line, and the brigade as a whole, dropped into a depression after advancing only a few hundred yards.<sup>218</sup> To the misfortune of the Sixth Wisconsin, the depression was filled knee-deep with water, adding to the cold and annoyed state of the soldiers.<sup>219</sup> The Sixth Wisconsin watched the fight a few hundred yards ahead push back and forth until a

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<sup>215</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years On The Firing Line*, 163.

<sup>216</sup> Nolan, *The Iron Brigade*, 168.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>218</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*, 111.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

Confederate counter attack pushed down a slope and into a rail embankment which sheltered a union brigade from Confederate artillery fire.

The Twenty-First Georgia advanced down the steep towards the rail tracks which harbored Federal's seeking cover from the counter attack. Captain James Nisbet fired his pistol wildly into and over any blue thing that moved.<sup>220</sup> Leading his company from the front, Captain Nisbet recalled ramming the heel of his boot into the head of a Yankee officer and buried the cowering man into the mud.<sup>221</sup> His men followed just as aggressively but were startled as they realized they were outnumbered severely. The Twenty-First Georgia began swinging wildly at everything, optioning to use whatever strength and aggressiveness they had left to beat submission into the fledgling Federals.<sup>222</sup> Another Confederate line approached and the exhausted Federals surrendered their position. Captain James Nisbet and his company dwelled along the rail bed in an exhausted state. Only a few hundred yards away, Major Rufus Dawes and the Sixth Wisconsin lay prone in line of battle, but with no desire or orders to press their advance.<sup>223</sup>

The Battle of Fredericksburg was an overwhelming and decisive victory for the Confederate Army, which closed out the first year of Major Rufus Dawes and Captain James Nisbet's military career. The engagement marked a turning point in the two junior officer's military careers. The successful leadership ability in which they both held, was not God-given, nor were the men born with the ability, but rather their traits were learned. Dawes and Nisbet educated themselves in haste as battle developed, and along with their fortune to learn along side an outstanding cast of officers taught themselves rapidly to lead in a decisive manor. In Major Rufus Dawes and Captain James Nisbet's first experience with combat, there are similarities but also vast differences that would play a part in the sculpting of each individual's command style.

By the time Rufus Dawes entered his first combat situation at Second Manassas, James Nisbet was already a veteran of two major military campaigns. During General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's Shenandoah Valley campaign, the Federal Army offered a poor fight as well as displaying atrocious command stability for most of the engagements. Captain Nisbet observed that it was rather easy to push

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<sup>220</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years On The Firing Line*, 181.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Allen, et al, *Campaigning With "Old Stonewall,"* 198.

the enemy from the field, let alone totally route the foe. As the result, Nisbet had the ability to practice his observation and control of the situation, as well as instruct the placement of his men with clear communication between he and his company. Nisbet's company understood that the officers would consistently display a coherent understanding of the battle, and in turn all what was expected from them was a rapid execution of their orders.

The defining characteristic of General Stonewall Jackson's military strategy was the idea of getting at the enemy with speed along with brute force. Aggressiveness served as a substitute for inferior troop numbers and stabilized his theory of offense is the best defense. This served as Jackson's mantra for the majority of his time in command. Captain James Nisbet displayed an understanding of this military theory, but only to a certain extent. During the Peninsula Campaign, Nisbet was apt to quickly realize that the ability to adapt to the situation as it presented itself in battle did prove to be a better play in most combat situations. Jackson's theory, as we now well know, caused incredible numbers of casualties, all the while only adding to the difficulties the Confederacy had in replacing the lost numbers. The concern Nisbet harbored was more of a personal matter. He cared for the wellness and the lives of his men. To him, it was a job for the junior officer to place his command in the proper place so unnecessary casualties would not accumulate. This idea is exercised first by Nisbet at Gaines' Mill, when command of the Twenty-First Georgia first placed in his command. Nisbet's immediate idea to pull-out of a worsening situation which contributed unnecessary casualties to his unit proved to be a wise order. Nisbet also understood that leaving the cover of the creek's bank, in an effort to continue the charge also could prove to be a catastrophic mistake. In order to exercise command of the situation, Nisbet rather came to the conclusion to pull the regiment back a short distance in an effort to consolidate and issue orders more conclusively.

At Gaines' Mill, the Confederate forces were not amalgamated until hours after the battle had begun. Captain Nisbet and countless other veteran junior officers understood by the looks of the piecemeal attacks, the high command did not have a correct idea of what was before them. It would be up to the junior officers to control the flow of battle until the brass could sort out their differences. As Nisbet redeployed the Twenty-First Georgia into combat, he chose to execute what is now known as suppressive fire. It is not known if Nisbet knew of this term at this point of history, but the order helped the Georgians

in gaining a foothold on the banks of the creek. Concentrating every shot, rather than ordering a charge in reckless manor towards an entrenched enemy, proved to be the better choice given the circumstances at hand. The maneuver provided much needed time for piecemeal reinforcements to arrive as well as assisted in a surge that pushed the Federals off of the high ground.

The surge came in the form of General John Bell Hood's Texas Brigade, who charged haphazardly into the fray. Though losing a large amount of good men, they eventually punctured the Federal line with the help of Nisbet and other regiments. Those who wrestled a point of support away from the stubborn Federals would be in the shadow of the wanton Texan charge. This was to be Captain Nisbet and the Twenty-First Georgia's first chaotic situation. It would have been easy for Nisbet's command to be chewed up in the face of that extreme dense Federal position. But Nisbet opted to throw out the idea of pushing toward the fortified enemy, and rather decided to establish a firing line. Nisbet exercised observation and placement of his regiment wonderfully, given the desperate situation. Saving a number of his men's lives in a time where destruction of regiments was all too commonplace in the Confederate Army.

Gaines' Mill was a trying trial for Captain James Nisbet. It is clear that he understood that in the thick of battle, decisions had to be made without clearance from generals who could hardly keep tabs on the movement of their units in the ensuing chaos. The Confederate Army command structure proved to be much more disorganized than that of their foe. Major Rufus Dawes was fortunate to have a competent command structure in his brigade. This was made evident as the Sixth Wisconsin stood toe-to-toe with Stonewall Jackson's entire corps at Second Manassas. Major Dawes was not yet a veteran at Second Manassas, though his brigade commander General John Gibbon was. Through outnumbered and rather exposed in their position, the Iron Brigade held its ground in a stubborn fashion, unknown to the Confederates at the time. General Gibbon expected a successful outcome and his expectations were only executed because of his junior officer's competency.

As General Jackson's Corps rolled carelessly towards the Sixth Wisconsin, Colonel Lysander Cutler, Lt. Colonel Edward Bragg and Major Rufus Dawes held literally an extremely exposed position. Through the regiment's accurate rifle fire stymied the Confederate advance, the Wisconsin men remained needlessly exposed, but with little option to disperse into cover. Major Dawes and the regimental

command decided to take up a more conservative prone position. Where tactics of the day wanted standing, close-massed units, the result often went as expected. In observing their position as foolish within minutes into their first battle, and with withdraw not an option, Major Dawes and his constituents displayed the will to fight as smartly as the situation offered. Unfortunately the field of battle did not offer much for both Federal and Confederate forces, and the stubbornness of both armies resulted in many pointless casualties. This is observed in Captain James Nisbet's command. Nisbet did not have the command of the Twenty-First Georgia during Second Manassas. All he and his fellow junior officers were able to order was to use any obstacle available to hide behind. The Twenty-First Georgia was decimated by repeated foolish charges ordered by its regimental commander. Following his command decisions at Antietam, this resonated with Nisbet deeply. While Nisbet silently protested recording the debacle, Major Rufus Dawes observed what not to do in a fight. Cover was imperative to success as well as survival. He understood there was to be no glory in being added to a casualty list following the battle. Much like Nisbet and the Twenty-First Georgia, Dawes and the Sixth Wisconsin did not have the luxury of cover imperative for survival. Instead, the Sixth Wisconsin opted to keep as close to the ground as they could for the most of the battle, affirming the fierceness of the fighting in which they faced in every engagement that the unit played a part in.

Observation was keen in the minds of Major Dawes and Captain Nisbet throughout their combat service. Both exercised a common sense of the correct thing to do in moments of uncertainty. The ability to rely on general officers to direct them was a rare in circumstance, leaving the direction of battle in the hands of junior officers, as their units had been at Gaines' Mill, Second Manassas and Antietam. The confusion was much too dense, often leaving field officers to learn by trial and error. However, the repercussions of error would be in lives, a toll that would prove costly for the veteran junior officers mentally, as the war progressed. But even when presented with seemingly impossible situations in combat, both Dawes and Nisbet somehow escaped unscathed, physically. Notwithstanding, the mental state of the officers labored severely as exhaustion and shock overcame their bodies. By the time the junior officers made their way out of the maelstrom of Antietam, their emotions became circumscribed into a haze. Dawes and Nisbet saw their commands reduced to that of the size of a company. Soldiers who were more like brothers were cut out of their lives instantly. This was much different than that of a

death of a single family member. It could be counted as the deaths of tens of family members all at once. However, both Dawes and Nisbet had to remain in control. It was important for those who remained not to see the pessimistic and physical cracks forming in their leadership.

Major Dawes and Captain Nisbet are also atypical cases of gender rolls at this time in history. Both Northern and Southern men both entered the war with a sense of extreme self-worth and an honorable name to protect. For the Southern soldier, honor was the cornerstone to their existence. Both Dawes and Nisbet hailed from similarly deep and patriotic family lines. However, the importance of their families heritage did not effect their immediate command style. It is doubtful that Captain Nisbet thought of his Scotch-Irish heritage as he lay along the Smoketown Road at Antietam. Both men had a deepened sense of duty, but their allegiance stood with their comrades rather than their family name. To lead to the best of their ability and lead their men out of combat safely became the overall purgative.

There are vast differences between Major Rufus Dawes and Captain James Nisbet in the realm of subordinates. Dawes had the ability to rely on many officers who were as competent in battle as he. To have the trust in fellow junior officers to execute as ordered proved vital to the Sixth Wisconsin's success in battle. While Captain Nisbet did have functional leaders in the junior officer ranks, most did not prove their worth as he or his superior Major Thomas Glover consistently did in combat. The proof is the delegation of command to Nisbet, who was not near the senior in rank. Although Nisbet would accept the duty of regimental command multiple times in tough situations, he could not hope for the chance to lead the regiment full-time. However, Rufus Dawes had this chance, and eventually found himself as Lieutenant Colonel of the Sixth Wisconsin at Gettysburg.

The bureaucracy that plagued the Confederate Army's promotion system, resulted in many misplaced officers in command of men whom they should never have had jurisdiction over in the first place. After the Battle of Fredericksburg, and seeing no future of promotion in a company-sized regiment, Captain James Nisbet made his way to Richmond in an effort to ask for permission to raise a regiment on his own. Using what prominence and pull his family had left, Nisbet was granted the opportunity to raise the Sixty-Sixth Georgia Infantry for service in the Western Theater of the Confederate Army.<sup>224</sup> Colonel

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<sup>224</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years On The Firing Line*, 186-187.

James Cooper Nisbet served through the rest of the war, even serving as a temporary brigade commander at the Battle of Chattanooga.<sup>225</sup> In the defense of Atlanta, Nisbet's military career came to a close as he was captured by an Ohio regiment and sent to Johnston's Island Prison for the remainder of the war.

Lieutenant Colonel Rufus Dawes did not meet such a distasteful fate. Dawes performed remarkably at Gettysburg, doing his part in the capture of an entire Mississippi regiment while once again foolishly waving the flag of his beloved Sixth Wisconsin. A year later, in the Summer of 1864, as he and the Sixth Wisconsin settled into their entrenchments around Petersburg, Virginia, Dawes received horrible news that his brother, Major Ephraim Dawes, had been horribly mangled in combat. His chin completely carried away by a round while at the head of the Fifty-Third Ohio Infantry. After all the death and destruction he had seen during the war, the sight of his younger brother struggling through gruesome facial surgery was too much for Rufus Dawes.<sup>226</sup> Having already lost too many brothers in service, Rufus Dawes put in a request for a discharge. He would stay with his brother as he convalesced in Ohio.

It is important to stray away from beaten path of history and explore the stories of the regular Americans who shaped the United States as it is today. In an effort to understand the who and why of this major turning point in American history, as far as Civil War military history, observing the minor characters in Civil War combat can assist in better understanding why a battle's outcome harbored such a result. Those who physically wrote the history can possibly unearth reasons why units behaved in such a manner. Officers who led in battle can offer more information on why a combat situation's outcome occurred, especially when a general officer miles away removed, could barely understand such a situation to their front. Though it is important to sort through those officers who create their own history just to save face in order to understand an accurate depiction of history. The indispensable junior officer carried with them into battle the faith of their men, the orders of their commander and the consequences of their decisions. It was the junior officer who executed and directed in combat. Major Rufus Dawes and Captain James Nisbet carried with them those often self-taught virtues of command, but the position also carried the curse of benevolent compassion as well.

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<sup>225</sup> Nisbet, *Four Years On The Firing Line*, 198-199.

<sup>226</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin*, 311-312.

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