

## *85th Regiment*

### *Pennsylvania Volunteers*

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On the 1st of August, 1861, Joshua B. Howell, of Uniontown, Fayette county, received an order from the Secretary of War, to recruit a regiment of infantry. Recruiting was immediately commenced, and ten companies, principally from the counties of Fayette, Washington, Somerset, and Greene, rendezvoused at Camp La Fayette, near Uniontown, during the months of September and October. The men were mostly from the agricultural districts, of good physique, and with few exceptions, were destitute of military experience.

On the 12th of November, the regiment was organized by the choice of the following field officers:

- Joshua B. Howell, Colonel
- Norton M'Giffin, of Washington county, Lieutenant Colonel
- Absalom Guiler, of Fayette county, Major

While in Camp La Fayette the regiment received a flag from the ladies of Uniontown, and clothing from the government, and drill, without arms, was commenced. Near the close of November it was ordered to Washington. At Harrisburg the State colors were presented by Governor Curtin, and upon its arrival at the National Capital, went into camp, where it received arms, and was carefully instructed and drilled. A little later it moved to Camp Good Hope, across the East Branch of the Potomac, where it was assigned to a brigade commanded by Colonel Tidball, consisting of the Eighty-fifth and Ninety-third Pennsylvania, and the Fifty-ninth and Eighty-sixth New York.

During the succeeding winter it was employed in the construction of works for the defence of Washington, fatigue duty greatly interfering with its instruction and drill. Schools, however, were established for the officers, by Colonel Howell, in which a marked efficiency was attained.

In March, 1862, the regiment was moved to Meridian Hill, where it was assigned to General Keim's Brigade,<sup>1</sup> subsequently Wessells'. On the 29th, it left Washington, and embarking at Alexandria, with the Fourth Corps, it proceeded to Fortress Monroe, where it joined the Army of the Potomac, arriving on the 1st of April. It participated in the siege

operations in front of Yorktown, and upon the withdrawal of the enemy, joined in pursuit by the Winn's Mill Eoad. It was engaged at Williamsburg, with a loss of two wounded, one mortally, being advanced under a heavy artillery fire to the relief of the Ninety-third Pennsylvania, and after the enemy had been driven, moved on with the army, crossing the Chickahominy near Bottom's Bridge, on the 20th of May, and taking position a little in advance of Fair Oaks Station.

### Fair Oaks (Seven Pines)

The troops were immediately put to fortifying; but the works had been only partially completed, when, at one P. M. of the 31st, the enemy attacked. The Eighty-fifth occupied rifle-pits on the right of the main work, a redoubt held by Hart's Battery.

"The enemy," says General Casey, "now attacked me in large force on the centre and both wings, and a brisk fire of musketry extended along the two opposing lines; my artillery in the meantime throwing canister into their ranks with great effect. \* \* \* When the charge had ceased, but not until the troops had reached the edge of the woods, the most terrible fire of musketry commenced that I have ever witnessed. The enemy again advanced in force, and the flanks having again been severely threatened, a retreat to the works became necessary. To be brief, the riflepits were retained until they were almost enveloped by the enemy-the troops, with some exceptions, fighting with spirit and gallantry."<sup>2</sup>

The loss in the regiment was severe. Lieutenants James Hamilton and Thomas S. Purviance were among the killed, and Julius A. Smith mortally wounded and a prisoner. In the Seven Days' Battles the regiment was not actively engaged, and suffered little loss. Its aggregate loss in the campaign was eighty-seven killed and wounded. When M'Clellan with the bulk of his army evacuated the Peninsula, Keyes' Corps remained on duty at Fortress Monroe.

Early on the morning of December 5th, Wessells' Brigade, at this time composed of the Eighty-fifth, One Hundred and First, and One Hundred and Third Pennsylvania, and the Eighty-fifth, Ninety-second, and Ninety-sixth New York, was ordered from Suffolk, Virginia, where it had been stationed, to Newbern, North Carolina, to reinforce General Foster, in command of the Eightteenth Corps. Marching via Gatesville to the Chowan River, it embarked upon transports, and arrived at its destination on the 9th. Foster was upon the point of starting upon an expedition to destroy a rebel gun-boat at White Hall, on the Neuse, burn the railroad bridge near Goldsboro, and make a diversion in favor of Burnside at Fredericksburg, in which the brigade

joined.

On the morning of the 13th, the column reached West Creek, where the enemy was found posted to dispute the passage. Wessells had the advance. The enemy had destroyed the bridge, and as the Union troops appeared, he opened with his artillery. Answering batteries were soon brought into play, and the Eighty-fifth was thrown to the right of the road, the Ninth New Jersey to the left, and an advance ordered. These were quickly across the stream, and moving upon the flanks of the enemy, compelled a hasty retreat, the enemy leaving two pieces of artillery, five killed, a number wounded, and some prisoners in the hands of the advancing regiments. The bridge was soon repaired and the column passed over.

As the command moved on the following morning, it soon came upon the enemy, and line of battle was immediately formed, Wessells' Brigade having the left. As it advanced, the fire of musketry became lively, and the artillery opened. The town of Kingston, situated on the north bank of the Neuse, had been thoroughly fortified on all sides except that by which the column approached, and this had been regarded as impassable by reason of impenetrable swamps on either side. But notwithstanding the natural difficulties, and the hot fire of the enemy, the troops pushed forward, wading through mud and water, until the impediments were successfully passed. It was now three o'clock in the afternoon. The column was immediately formed for a charge, which was gallantly executed, routing the enemy and driving him across the river. As he retired, he fired the bridge; but the pursuit was so close that the flames were arrested and the bridge saved. The loss of the regiment was nine wounded.

At White Hall a brisk skirmish was had, and on the 17th the column arrived at Goldsboro, where the enemy was drawn up for the defence of the bridge, the destruction of which was a main object of the expedition. Line of battle was formed, which swept the enemy before it, driving him across the river, and burning the bridge. A considerable portion of the railroad was also destroyed, when, the object of the expedition having been attained, the force returned to Newbern.

On the 1st of January, 1863, the brigade moved to the south side of the Trent River, opposite the town, where for several weeks the Eighty-fifth performed camp duty, and exercised in the skirmish drill. Subsequently it moved to a camp about three miles west of Newbern. Towards the close of the month General Foster was ordered, with a part of his command, to South Carolina, to co-operate with General Hunter in his operations against Charleston. The Eighty-fifth arrived at Hilton Head on the 1st of February. The brigade was now in command of Colonel Howell, the regiment of Lieutenant Colonel Purviance.

At the beginning of April the brigade moved to Cole's Island, and crossing Folly River, landed on Folly Island. Under cover of darkness it made its way through the thick undergrowth to the head of the island. No enemy was found, and here the troops were spectators of the first bombardment of Fort Sumter by Admiral Dupont. The attack proved unsuccessful, and the fleet, with the land troops, except Howell's brigade, which was left to garrison the island, were withdrawn. General Vogdes was put in command of the post, and the force was soon after increased.

Folly Island is about seven miles long and one wide. On the north-west it is separated from James Island by Folly River, a narrow but deep stream. Between the river and James Island is a wide stretch of marshes. On the south-east it is washed by the Atlantic Ocean. Lighthouse Inlet, about six hundred yards wide, separates it from Morris Island on the north. Roads, of which there were none, were immediately cut, and works erected for its defence, in which the Eighty-fifth bore its part of watching and toil.

### Fort Wagner

Early in June General Hunter was superseded by General Gilmore, who immediately commenced operations to possess Morris Island. To this end powerful batteries were erected on the north end of Folly Island. The work was performed exclusively by night, and the thick undergrowth served as a screen to the working parties. When the works were completed it was cut away, and the heavy guns, forty-four in number, were opened. The assaulting party, under General Strong, drove the enemy, and gained possession of his first line of works; but Fort Wagner, to the north, still held out.

Two gallant assaults were made upon it, but without success; and General Gilmore determined to carry it by regular approaches. Ground was broken on the 21st of July, and the work, which was terribly exhausting, was pushed forward with the utmost vigor, day and night. Neither the heat of a tropical climate, nor the missiles of a vigilant enemy, were allowed to interfere with the labor.

On the 20th of August the Eighty-fifth Pennsylvania, One Hundredth New York, and the Third New Hampshire, were detailed to occupy the advance trenches, each twenty-four hours in turn. The trenches were shallow, and afforded little protection from the enemy's fire. On the left were his powerful guns on James Island and Fort Johnson; in front those of Sumter, Gregg, and Wagner; and on the right Fort Moultrie. The nights were damp and cold, and during the day the thermometer stood at 100~ in the shade. The casualties were numerous, and the sick list increased with alarming rapidity.

The Eighty-fifth took its turn in this terrible ordeal, and on the 21st had one killed and twenty wounded, three mortally; on the 24th, one killed and seven wounded, one mortally; on the 27th, two killed and eight wounded, three mortally; on the 30th, four killed and eight wounded, Lieutenant Colonel Purviance being among the killed; on the 2d of September, five wounded, one mortally.

The losses by sickness and casualties were becoming so alarming that Surgeon Hamlin, Medical Inspector of the department, reported that unless Wagner should soon fall, the troops would not be in a condition to longer prosecute the siege. The Eighty-fifth went upon the outer works with an aggregate strength of four hundred and fifty-one, and on the last day, September 2d, it could muster but two hundred and seventy fit for duty. Two unsuccessful attempts were made to surprise the garrison, and capture Fort Gregg. General Gilmore then determined to again assault Fort Wagner; but a bombardment lasting forty hours from land and sea--prelude to the intended assault which was to have been led by General Terry--compelled its evacuation. It was followed by the abandonment of the entire island, which was immediately occupied by the Union troops.

Upon the fall of Lieutenant Colonel Purviance, Captain Abraham assumed command of the regiment, Colonel Howell being in command of the brigade, and Major Campbell on the staff of General Vogdes. Soon after Major Campbell was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, and Captain Isaac M. Abraham to Major.

In the early part of December the regiment was ordered to Hilton Head, and upon its arrival went into camp a short distance from Port Royal. Here, on pleasant camping ground, with light duty, the health and strength of the regiment rapidly improved. In February, 1864, in company with the Fourth New Hampshire, it was detailed to proceed on an expedition to White Marsh, a small island near Savannah, for the purpose of dispersing a force of the enemy employed with a working party of three hundred negroes in throwing up fortifications.

The proper dispositions were made, and a landing effected; but upon advancing, the rebel force was found to be much stronger than anticipated, and the minor works covered by a strong fort well mounted and manned. After severe skirmishing which developed the posture of affairs, the Union forces were withdrawn and the enterprize abandoned. The Eighty-fifth lost two wounded, and one, Captain John E. Michener, taken prisoner.

About the middle of April, three divisions of the troops under General Gilmore, comprising the Tenth Corps, were ordered to Virginia, to reinforce the Army of the James. They consisted of the divisions of Terry, Turner and Ames, Terry's Division, the First, being composed of

the brigades of Howell, Hawley and Barton. The regiment left Hilton Head with many regrets, and as the Fulton, on which it was embarked, steamed out of the harbor, many a longing, lingering look was cast behind at the pleasant places and comfortable quarters which would know them no more. Upon its arrival at Gloucester Point, it was joined by the veterans, who had been absent on furlough, and a considerable number of conscripts. Soon after its arrival, the Tenth Corps, with the Eighteenth proceeded to Bermuda Hundred, and took position on the narrow neck of land between the James and the Appomattox.

### **Bermuda Hundred**

In the operations of the army which followed, the Eighty-fifth was periodically upon the picket line, and employed in fortifying, but without being seriously engaged, until the 20th of May. Butler's forces had been driven back behind his fortifications, and the enemy had succeeded in capturing a line of rifle-pits in front of Terry's Division. Howell's Brigade was ordered to drive him out and re-possess them. The charge was gallantly made, and the works re-taken. The rebel General Walker, in command, had his horse shot under him, and was himself wounded and taken prisoner. The loss in the Eighty-fifth was two killed and twenty-one wounded.

The regiment remained in this position, taking its place in turn upon the picket line, and in defending the works, the enemy well fortified in front, in strong force, and eager and watchful to secure an advantage. Artillery duels were of almost daily occurrence, and picket firing rarely ceased, sometimes rising to a perfect storm.

On the 14th of June, Grant's forces began to cross the James, and soon after carried the outer works before Petersburg. Being hard pressed, the enemy abandoned his works between the James and the Appomattox, which were immediately occupied by the Tenth Corps, and some prisoners captured. Lee's advance crossed the James, above Fort Darling on the 16th, and during the afternoon skirmishing became very brisk. Early on the morning of the 17th, the enemy attacked the picket line in front of Howell's Brigade, the Eighty-fifth occupying the works evacuated the day previous. The fighting became very heavy, and the regiment being hard pressed by a superior force and obliged to yield, fell back to the rifle-pits on the old line. The loss on this and the following day, when the fighting was renewed, was five killed and twelve wounded, two mortally.

### **Deep Bottom**

On the 20th of June, the regiment accompanied the corps on an expedition to Deep Bottom, but only remained until the 25th, when, with Howells Brigade, it returned again to camp and its place upon the

lines. An agreement was entered into between the pickets on either side not to fire on each other, unless in case of an advance, and coffee, tobacco, and newspapers became subjects of daily traffic. Deserters from the enemy came in in large numbers. By the accidental explosion of a shell on the 9th of July, one man was killed, and three wounded.

On the 13th of August, the Tenth Corps in connection with the Second, under Hancock, proceeded again to Deep Bottom, where the enemy, consisting of the corps of Longstreet and Hill, were found in strong force. Hancock led the Second Corps into position along the New Market Road on the east side of Four Mile Creek, his left resting on that stream.

Early on the morning of the 14th, Foster's Division of the Tenth Corps moved out to Strawberry Plains, and encountered the enemy's skirmishers, who fell back to his intrenchments. Foster's right rested on the west bank of Four Mile Creek, and Terry's Division joined Foster's left. Skirmishing was kept up until nine o'clock, when Terry's Division charged, capturing a long line of earth-works. Most of the division was protected by a wood, until within a hundred yards of the works; but the Eighty-fifth was obliged to advance over an open field, where it was fearfully exposed to the enemy's fire. The enemy retired to another and stronger line some distance in the rear, and Terry rested in the captured works until evening, when he moved to the support of Foster, who charged making further captures of earth-works, including two mortars, four eight-inch howitzers, and a number of prisoners. Further movements were made on the following day which resulted in some fighting, but without material advantage.

The loss in the Eighty-fifth was two killed and nineteen wounded, five mortally. Lieutenant William T. Campbell was killed.

At nine o'clock on the morning of the 16th, Terry's Division moved to the front, some distance north of the position held the day before. The pickets of the enemy, protected by rifle-pits, were encountered, but after considerable skirmishing, they were driven out and fell back to a strong line of earth-works. The division was massed in columns for charging them, and at the word "forward" the Eighty-fifth, under Captain Hughes, Major Abraham having been wounded on the day previous, dashed forward through the slashed timber, and in face of an incessant musketry fire, never wavering nor halting, until the works in its front were carried, and Terry's Division was in full possession; but the troops connecting with it on the right had been less successful, and the enemy, recovering from the shock, and having received reinforcements, commenced a vigorous attack on its flank, which compelled it to fall back. Retiring about four hundred yards a new line was established, and fortified.

About two hundred prisoners were captured in the charge. The Eighty-fifth, in addition to a number of prisoners, took three stands of colors. Its loss was severe. An eye witness says,

" the enemy withheld his fire until the troops were close to his works, and when the first volley was delivered I thought the men were lying down to protect themselves from the fire. It was only when the thinned ranks closed up, as they quickly did, that I realized that the fallen were either killed or wounded."

The loss was nine killed and fifty-four wounded, five mortally, and one taken prisoner. Captains Lewis Watkins and Levi M. Rogers were among the mortally wounded. On the afternoon of the 18th the enemy charged, but was easily repulsed, the Eighty-fifth, under cover of a rude breast-work, having but one wounded.

On the 20th the troops were all withdrawn from the north side of the James, except Foster's Division, and the regiment returned to its old camp where it rested until the 24th, when the Tenth Corps was ordered to the south side of the Appomattox, where it occupied a strong line of works and rifle-pits. Casualties from sharp-shooters and from the enemy's shells were of almost daily occurrence. On the 13th of September the Eighty-fifth was ordered to Fort Morton, a fourteen gun battery, for garrison duty. Just previous to this change, Colonel Howell was assigned to the command of a division of colored troops, and Colonel Pond of the Sixty-second Ohio, succeeded him in command of the brigade.

On the night of the 12th of September, while returning from corps headquarters, Colonel Howell was thrown from his horse, and so severely injured that he soon after died. On being relieved at the fort two weeks later, the regiment returned to the division, and with it joined in the movement across the James, by the Tenth and Eighteenth corps, by which Fort Harrison was captured and a long line of earth-works at Chapin's Farm, the Eighty-fifth twice advancing to within three miles of the rebel capital. In the operations of the army upon this part of the line, the regiment participated, being engaged on the 1st of October, and again on the 7th, when three divisions of the enemy attacked Kautz's Cavalry, driving him back, capturing several pieces of his artillery, and striking the right of Terry's Division. Pond's Brigade occupied the left of the line, and the Eighty-fifth the part where it crosses the New Market Road. The engagement continued until three o'clock in the afternoon, when the enemy, having suffered severely, withdrew, closely pursued by Terry, recovering the ground lost by Kautz. The loss in the Eighty-fifth was three wounded. On the 12th General Terry, temporarily in command of the corps, was ordered to make a reconnoissance with the First find

Third divisions upon the Darbytown Road. The Eighty-fifth was deployed as skirmishers in front of Pond's brigade, and soon encountered the enemy's skirmishers, who were driven back to a recently constructed earth-work mounted with artillery. A charge was made upon it but was unsuccessful. The enemy in turn charged, but was easily repulsed. Towards evening the command returned to its entrenchments. The Eighty-fifth lost seven wounded, one mortally.

On the 14th of October, the regiment was ordered from the front, the veterans and recruits were transferred to the One Hundred and Eighty-eighth Pennsylvania, and the balance, whose terms of service were soon to expire, reported at Portsmouth and were ordered into camp. A month later it proceeded to Pittsburg, where, on the 22d of November, it was mustered out of service.

Before leaving Portsmouth, five commissioned officers and fifty enlisted men, under Major Abraham, were detailed as guard to a fleet of transports carrying rebel prisoners for exchange from Point Lookout, Maryland, to Savannah, Georgia. There was so much delay upon the sailing of the fleet, and after its arrival at its destination, before the exchange was effected, that this detachment did not return until some time after the muster out of the rest of the regiment.

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<sup>1</sup> Organization of the Second Brigade, General Keim, Third Division, General Casey, Fourth Corps, General Keyes. Eighty-fifth Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers, Colonel Joshua B. Howell; One Hundred and First Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers, Colonel Joseph H. Wilson; One Hundred and Third Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers, Colonel Theodore F. Lehmann; Ninety-sixth Regiment New York Volunteers, Colonel James Fairman.

<sup>2</sup> Moore's Rebellion Record, Vol. V, p. 80.

**Source:**

Bates, Samuel P. *History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861-65*, Harrisburg, 1868-1871.

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**Organization:**

Organized at Uniontown October 16 to November 12, 1861.  
Left State for Washington, D.C.

Attached to 2nd Brigade, Casey's Division, Army Potomac, to March, 1862.

2nd Brigade, 3rd Division, 4th Army Corps, Army Potomac, to June, 1862.

2nd Brigade, 2nd Division, 4th Army Corps, to September, 1862.

Wessell's Brigade, Division at Suffolk, Va., 7th Corps, Dept. of Virginia, to December,

1862.

1st Brigade, 1st Division, Dept. of North Carolina, to January, 1863.  
 2nd Brigade, 3rd Division, 18th Army Corps, Dept. of North Carolina, to February, 1863.  
 2nd Brigade, 2nd Division, 18th Corps, Dept. of the South, to April, 1863.  
 Folly Island, S. C., 10th Corps, Dept. South, to June, 1863.  
 1st Brigade, Folly Island, S.C., 10th Corps, to July, 1863.  
 1st Brigade, 2nd Division, Morris Island, S.C., 10th Corps, July, 1863.  
 2nd Brigade, Morris Island, S.C., 10th Corps, to October, 1863.  
 Howell's Brigade, Gordon's Division, Folly Island, S.C., 10th Corps, to December, 1863.  
 District of Hilton Head, S.C., 10th Corps, to April, 1864.  
 1st Brigade, 1st Division, 10th Army Corps, Dept. of Virginia and North Carolina, to November, 1864.

#### Service:

Duty in the Defences of Washington, D. C., till March, 1862.  
 Advance on Manassas, Va., March 10-15.  
 Moved to the Peninsula March 28.  
 Siege of Yorktown April 5-May 4.  
 Battle of Williamsburg May 5.  
 Reconnoissance to Seven Pines May 24-27.  
 Skirmishes at Seven Pines, Savage Station and Chickahominy May 24.  
 Seven Pines May 29.  
 Battle of Seven Pines, Fair Oaks, May 31-June 1.  
 Seven days before Richmond June 25-July 1.  
 Brackett's June 30.  
 Malvern Hill July 1.  
 At Harrison's Landing till August 16.  
 Moved to Fortress Monroe August 16-23, thence to Suffolk September 18,  
 and duty there till December.  
 Reconnoissance to Franklin on the Blackwater October 3.  
 Ordered to New Berne, N. C., December 4.  
 Foster's Expedition to Goldsboro December 10-21.  
 Southwest Creek December 13-14.  
 Kinston December 14.  
 Whitehall December 16.  
 Goldsboro December 17.  
 Duty at New Berne, N. C., till January, 1863.  
 Moved to Port Royal, S.C., January 28-31.  
 At St. Helena Island, S. C., till April.  
 At Folly Island, S.C., till July.  
 Attack on Morris Island July 10.  
 Assaults on Fort Wagner, Morris, Island, S.C., July 11 and 18.  
 Siege of Forts Wagner and Gregg, Morris Island,  
 and operations against Fort Sumpter and Charleston July 18-September 7.  
 Duty on Morris and Folly Islands operating against Charleston till December.  
 Moved to Hilton Head, S. C., and duty there till April, 1864.  
 Expedition to Whitmarsh Island, Ga., February 22.  
 Moved to Gloucester Point, Va., April.  
 Butler's operations on south side of James River and  
 against Petersburg and Richmond May 4-28.  
 Ware Bottom Church May 9.  
 Swift Creek or Arrow field Church May 9-10.  
 Proctor's Creek and operations against Fort Darling May 12-16.  
 Battle of Drewry's Bluff May 14-16.  
 Operations on Bermuda Hundred front May 17-30.

Ware Bottom Church May 20.  
 Port Walthal June 16-17.  
 Siege operations against Petersburg and Richmond June 16 to November 22, 1864.  
 Ware Bottom Church June 20.  
 Demonstration on north side of the James at Deep Bottom August 13-20.  
 Strawberry Plains, Deep Bottom, August 14-18.  
 Chaffin's Farm, New Market Heights, September 28-30.  
 Darbytown Road October 7.  
 Battle of Fair Oaks October 27-28.  
 Mustered out November 22, 1864.  
 Veterans and Recruits transferred to 188th Pennsylvania Infantry.

#### Losses:

Regiment lost during service:

7 Officers and 90 Enlisted men killed and mortally wounded and  
 4 Officers and 146 Enlisted men by disease.

Total 247.

Dyer, Frederick H. *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion Compiled and Arranged from Official Records of the Federal and Confederate Armies, Reports of the Adjutant Generals of the Several States, the Army Registers, and Other Reliable Documents and Sources.* Des Moines, Iowa: The Dyer Publishing Company, 1908

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[Return to Pennsylvania in the Civil War](#)

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