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Falling Like Autumn Leaves: Cutler's Brigade at Gettysburg

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Falling Like Autumn Leaves: Cutler's Brigade at Gettysburg

Abstract

The 147th New York's monument stands along Reynolds Avenue, silently (and incorrectly) marking where the regiment bravely fought and fell on that July day in 1863. The monument lists the brigade, division, and corps of the regiment, along with the various other battles that are part of the regiment's story. It also lists the regimental losses as well - out of 380 men that started the fight on July 1, 212 men were killed and wounded. Placed by the veterans themselves, they knew what that monument represented. It represented the entire ordeal of their regiment and its brigade on the first day of Gettysburg. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

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Comments

Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public is written by alum and adjunct professor, John Rudy. Each post is his own opinions, musings, discussions, and questions about the Civil War era, public history, historical interpretation, and the future of history. In his own words, it is "a blog talking about how we talk about a war where over 600,000 died, 4 million were freed and a nation forever changed. Meditating on interpretation, both theory and practice, at no charge to you."

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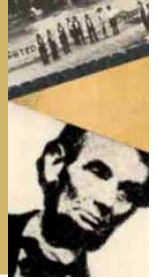
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Interpreting the Civil War

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Falling Like Autumn Leaves: Cutler's Brigade at Gettysburg

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147th New York Monument
CC Flickr user [Runner Jenny](#)

The 147th New York's monument stands along Reynolds Avenue, silently ([and incorrectly](#)) marking where the regiment bravely fought and fell on that July day in 1863. The monument lists the brigade, division, and corps of the regiment, along with the various other battles that are part of the regiment's story. It also lists the regimental losses as well - out of 380 men that started the fight on July 1, 212 men were killed and wounded. Placed by the veterans themselves, they knew what that monument represented. It represented the entire ordeal of their regiment and its brigade on the first day of Gettysburg.

For, Cutler's brigade, of which they were a part, was one of the first U.S. infantry units to fight in the battle of Gettysburg. Comprised of hearty New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians, the 147th and the rest of Cutler's brigade battled it out on the first day west of town with troops from North Carolina and Mississippi. In a few short moments, Cutler's brigade, and the 147th New York along with it, was decimated as it struggled to buy time for the rest of the

United States Army to arrive on the battlefield.

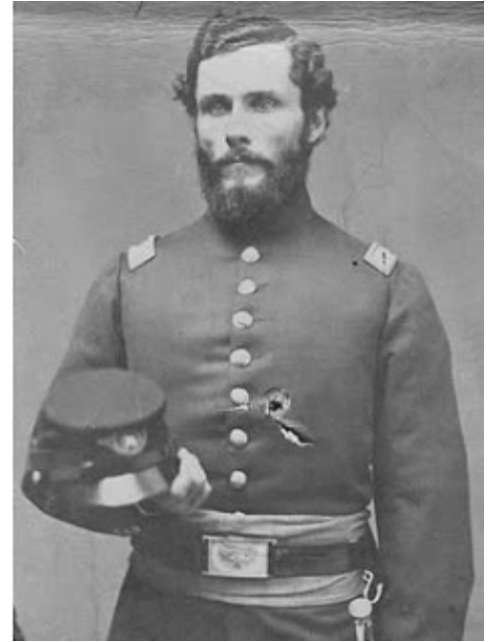
One of the first to fall in the opening engagement was Major Grover, commanding officer of the 76th New York, the 147th's sister regiment. One of the initial Rebel volleys killed his horse, dismounting the major. Not losing a step, it was recalled that the Major could be seen waving his sword as he raced on foot up and down the line of the New Yorkers. Soon though, a bullet struck close to his heart. He pleaded with his men as they were falling back, "You will not go off and leave me will you?" Some of his men attempted to carry him off, but to no avail - Major Grover realized he was dying. "Boys, it is no use carrying me an farther..." he told them. Major Grover lived just long enough to hand off his watch and rank badges to a friend before passing. Grover was a Methodist minister before the war. At 32 years of age, he left behind 3 daughters and a wife back in Cortland, NY.

Captain Story, also of the 76th, had a close call when they first arrived on the battlefield - a cannon ball passed between his legs plowing up the ground behind him. Later, Story was wounded in the thigh, the ball shattering his bone in three parts. He was taken to Mrs. William Culp's home in town. There, surgeons were only able to remove some of the broken bone. Story's wife and sister were with

him when he passed on August 6th. All told, Major Grover's boys of the 76th New York suffered over 150 casualties on the first day of Gettysburg.

the 147th, from Oswego, New York, another town outside Syracuse, fared even worse on July 1st. Fighting just south of the 76th, the 147th was out in front and bore attacks from multiple sides. The first to fall in the 147th was a man by the name of Fred Rife. Rife and his partner in the battleline, Hiram Stowell, fell almost at the same time. A 33 year-old farmer-laborer, Stowell left behind his wife Charlotte and two children.

Soon into the engagement, the 147th New York was forced to fall back from its initial position. During the retreat, Lieutenant Guilford D. Mace cheered on his men, shouting words of encouragement, "Do not fall back, boys, but give the Rebels what they deserve!" Although Mace had been slightly wounded earlier in the fight, he refused to leave the field. In fact, Mace never did leave the field alive. As his men were retreating, Mace fell with a shot in both the neck and the back, the wounds breaking his back and severely paralyzing him. Lying on the field, Mace sent word to a friend, to write his wife and tell her he was dead. As he was making known his last wishes, a shell exploded near him, ripping his body to shreds. Back home in Fulton, New York, Mace's wife was just made a widow, and Mace's three young children just became fatherless.



Major Grover, one of the first to fall
Courtesy of the NY State Military Museum

The original color-bearer, affectionately known as "the big Swede", standing a fair-haired, blue-eyed, 6 feet 2 inches, Sgt. John Hinchcliff, was shot several times during the retreat. One of the bullets pierced his heart as he fell to earth wrapped up in the bloody and torn flag. A gas fitter from Rochester, New York, John left behind 3 children - John Jr., Rola, and Panneila, and his wife Elizabeth.

Lt J. Volney Pierce remembered that men were "falling like autumn leaves," as the 147th abandoned the field. During the retreat, Pierce found Edwin G. Alyesworth lying on the ground, a mere 21 year old boy, mortally wounded. Edwin recognized Pierce, calling out to the Lieutenant not to leave him behind. Sgt Peter Shultz and Pierce tried to carry the young private to the rear, but they couldn't manage to carry Alyesworth, who was wounded in the thigh. Fearing their own lives, the pair dropped Alyesworth and ran for their lives. For the next twenty-five years, Pierce recalled that he could still vividly remember Edwin's last words to him. "Don't leave me, boys," haunted his dreams. Alyesworth's leg was later amputated on July 3. Just hours before his father arrived in Gettysburg on July 10th, Alyesworth died from the wound.

News reached upper New York of the horrible fight at Gettysburg just as many towns were putting the final preparations together for Independence Day celebrations. Instead of celebrating, the towns prepared to mourn. Later, on July 6th, several wounded officers from the 147th arrived home in Oswego, the first eye-witnesses to tell of the terrible fighting. War came and touched Gettysburg on July 1. In the coming days, it touched town after town, city after city across the United States as news of the battle reached home. The monuments that stand on the fields of Gettysburg are just markers,

made of stone and metal. But those markers also recall a story, one that touched not only Gettysburg, but towns, people, and places across the United States.