



In the Bloody Railroad Cut at Gettysburg: The 6th Wisconsin of the Iron Brigade and its Famous Charge

Lance J. Herdegen, William J.K. Beaudot

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The storied Iron Brigade carved out a unique reputation during the Civil War. Its men fought on many hard fields, but they performed their most legendary exploits just outside a small Pennsylvania town called Gettysburg on the first day of July in 1863. There were many heroic actions that morning and afternoon, but the fight along an unfinished deep scar in the ground north of the Chambersburg Pike was one never forgotten, and is the subject of Lance J. Herdegen's and William J. K. Beaudot's award-winning (and long out of print) *In the Bloody Railroad Cut at Gettysburg: The 6th Wisconsin of the Iron Brigade and its Famous Charge*.

The railroad cut fighting was led mainly by the "Calico Boys" of the 6th Wisconsin Volunteers. Detached from the balance of the Iron Brigade, the Badgers of the 6th charged nearly 200 yards to meet a Confederate brigade that had swung into what looked like an ideal defensive position along an unfinished railroad cut northwest of town. The fighting was close, brutal, personal, and bloody—and it played a key role in the final Union victory.

The Wisconsin men always remembered that moment when they stood under "a galling fire" in an open field just north of the pike. Using hundreds of firsthand accounts, many previously unpublished, Herdegen and Beaudot carry their readers into the very thick of the fighting. The air seemed "full of bullets," one private recalled, the men around him dropping "at a fearful rate." Pvt. Amos Lefler was on his hands and knees spitting blood and teeth with Capt. Johnny Ticknor of Company K down and dying just a handful of yards away. Pvt. James P. Sullivan felt defenseless, unable as he was to get his rifle-musket to fire because of bad percussion caps. Rebel buckshot, meanwhile, smashed the canteen and slashed the hip of Sgt. George Fairfield. Behind the Wisconsin men, Lt. Col. Rufus Dawes watched a "fearful" and "destructive" Confederate fire crashing with "an unbroken roar before us. Men were being shot by twenties and thirties."

While frantically loading and shooting, the Badgers leaned into the storm of bullets coming from the cut 175 yards away. The Westerners pushed slowly into the field and—at that very instant when victory or defeat teetered undecided—the "Jayhawkers" in the Prairie du Chien Company began shouting "Charge! Charge! Charge!" And so they did. Young Dawes lifted his sword and shouted "Forward! Forward Charge! Align on the Colors!" It was at that moment, remembered Cpl. Frank Wallar, a farmer-turned-soldier who would soon make his name known to history by capturing the flag of the 2nd Mississippi, "there was a general rush and yells enough to almost awaken the dead."

Out of print for nearly two decades, this facsimile reprint and its new Introduction share with yet another generation of readers the story of the 6th Wisconsin's magnificent charge. Indeed it is their story, and how they remembered it. And it is one you will never forget.

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