

to withdraw. It may be best to intrench where we are for the present, but we must withdraw as soon as practicable and prudent." White telegraphed back with advice that they could hold the Crater permanently by incorporating it into the Union trench system. The topography made this foolhardy, however, and when Meade refused, Burnside did not press the point. He did ask, and was quickly granted permission, to postpone his withdrawal until dark, when the Confederate cross fire might have subsided. White sent Burnside's dispatch on to the division commanders, instructing them in turn to consult with their commanders in the field as to the "proper time of evacuation."

Both Potter and Willcox read the dispatch and sent it on for endorsement to the general officers in the Crater, those being Hartranft, Griffin and Bartlett. None of Burnside's division commanders actually signed the order. Burnside sent for the commanders to meet with him at Fort Morton, as he felt it imperative to have a perfect understanding as to the method and timing of a withdrawal. Meade had provided absolutely no dispositions for assistance from the other corps in that effort. There was absolutely no chance of diversionary attacks to cover the withdrawal or to otherwise occupy the Confederates except for keeping up a fire on their entrenched lines. After discussion, it was mutually agreed that the optimum method for evacuation was to dig a trench or a series of trenches from the Federal main line to the Crater, thereby providing the troops' protection as they withdrew. Unfortunately, Burnside's order to withdraw and his request for input from the generals in the Crater did not reach the fiery cauldron until 12:30 P.M., when the dust and sun had long since emptied every canteen.<sup>14</sup>

With all the important decisions seemingly having been fully made, Grant and Meade saw no further reason to remain on the tactical front. Meade decided there was nothing more that could be accomplished, having determined there were enough troops on hand at the front to defend themselves against any counterattacks, and that Burnside and Ord could insure that their troops were pulled out as safely as possible. He indicated that he would, however, remain in telegraphic communication with the front, and thus he expected to be continuously informed "of anything that should occur."<sup>15</sup> Meade was unaware of any difficulty in the manner of removing the Ninth Corps troops and later wondered why they had not been so removed, presuming that "our men were [actually] in the crater...." At about the same time, Grant also departed to his City Point headquarters, and, in essence, had washed his hands of the whole affair.

Mahone's hold on the recaptured Confederate works was a tenuous one, however, given the limited number of Confederate troops engaged. Additionally, his assault had failed to retake the Crater itself and the undemolished redoubt to the left of the pit. To ensure that his foothold would remain permanent, Mahone definitely had to bring more troops into action, and very soon. Thus, he called upon Lieutenant Colonel Matthew R. Hall, then in command of Wright's Georgia Brigade, to move Willcox's troops out of the trenches south of the Crater, in addition to retaking the pit itself. By this time, Hall's men had all arrived in the ravine, and its commanders had been briefed by Mahone himself. Thus, it fell upon the Georgians, in Mahone's words, to "clean up the job and to restore the full integrity of our line and to remove absolutely the peril to which Gen'l Lee's Army had been fearfully exposed by the success of the mine."

At 10:00 A.M., an hour after the Virginia Brigade had charged, Hall's Georgians were ordered forward from the same ravine from which their Virginia comrades had recently begun their assault. Their mission was to retake the fifty yards of captured Confederate works to the right of the Virginia Brigade and south of the Crater.<sup>16</sup>

Wright's brigade that day was made up of the 3rd Georgia under Lieutenant Colonel Clai-

borne Snead, the 22nd Georgia under Colonel George H. Jones, the 48th Georgia under Lieutenant Colonel Reuben W. Carswell and the 64th Georgia under Colonel John W. Evans.<sup>17</sup> Also, part of the brigade at the time was the 10th Georgia Battalion and the 2nd Georgia Battalion, although these units did not move out with Mahone on his march that morning, as the 10th Georgia Battalion was engaged on picket duty in the Confederate trenches back at their front lines. The brigade was led that morning by Lieutenant Colonel Matthew R. Hall from Augusta.<sup>18</sup> The unit had been positioned over two miles to the right of the Crater at the time of the explosion, and followed the Virginia Brigade on its journey to the front. Colonel Hall had until recently been the temporary commander of the 48th Georgia, which had captured the colors of the 87th Pennsylvania on June 22, 1864.

The 3rd Georgia, otherwise known as the "old Third" in Anderson's Division, was one of the historic old regiments in Georgia, by then needing "no laudation, as its gallant deeds are entwined around the hearts of its grateful people." It was formed early in 1861 and marched out of Augusta on May 1, 1861, with Wright as its colonel (who was later to take command of the Georgia Brigade). The regiment fought in all the major battles in Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania. The 48th Georgia was also a veteran regiment, having been organized in March of 1862 in Effingham, and it also participated in all the major battles of the Army of Northern Virginia, along with the 3rd Georgia. The 22nd Georgia, commanded by Colonel George H. Jones, was likewise a veteran unit, having been mustered in on September 1861 at Big Shanty, and also participated in the major battles of the Army of Northern Virginia. The 64th Georgia was organized in the spring of 1863 and fought in Florida, including the battle of Olustee in February 1864. It was then transferred to Petersburg in May, where it was originally a part of Wise's Brigade, and then Johnson's old Tennessee Brigade, before being inherited by Mahone.<sup>19</sup> Being the youngest regiment in the brigade, and having been spared much of the heavy fighting to date that its fellow units had endured, it had an effective strength of 388 men that morning, far greater than the others. The 48th Georgia had previously gone in on the right of Mahone's brigade with the Virginians in their charge. "The bullets whistled by us here faster than any man in the brigade ever heard before, and it was certainly one of the most sanguinary fights on record." The regiment occupied the works to the right of Mahone's immediate right, and kept up a continuous fire on the enemy until the whole line was re-established. In its front the "dead lay thicker than ... [had ever] been seen on any battle-field of this war."<sup>20</sup>

In the respite between the attack of the Virginia Brigade and that of the Georgia Brigade, the Federal troops in and around the Crater were about to undergo yet another serious test. By this point, they had largely cleared out from the trenches everywhere, unbeknownst to Mahone. The entire Ninth Corps was by now trapped either in the Crater itself or in the undemolished portion of the redoubt where Hartranft, who was in the process of marshalling both his and Humphrey's brigades, had established himself. Several thousand Federal soldiers were now trapped in a front less than a hundred yards wide and in a very poor position to defend themselves. Whatever scant organization they had experienced was by then altogether makeshift. To most of those in the Crater and its environs, the charge of the Virginia Brigade, followed by the massing of the Georgians, spelt the beginning of the end, regardless of Burnside's positive protestations back at headquarters.

Mahone hurried back to the Georgia Brigade from the line recently retaken by the Virginians<sup>21</sup> and explained the situation and how its men must make a move to retake that part of the Confederate works south of the Crater, on the right of the Virginia Brigade,<sup>22</sup> and "tidy things up." When the charge was to be executed, the Virginians were instructed to keep down and to fire rapidly in their front to cover the new assault. Every man had been supplied with

several guns—his own and others found lying in the trenches in huge quantities. Shortly after 10:00 A.M., the Georgians formed, the command to forward was quietly given, and the troops started in "as gallantly as any men could." The command was promptly obeyed and the 64th Georgia under the command of Captain Thomas J. Pritchett immediately acted with great gallantry in the lead, as "emergency demanded the most desperate remedies, and most faithfully did the Sixty-fourth administer them." The brigade came out of the protection of the swale, and immediately found itself met with a steady stream of lead and iron.

General Hartranft had employed every man who could fight in line in the undemolished portion of the fort, and Sergeant Wesley Stanley of the 14th New York Heavy Artillery oversaw the loading of both captured guns with captured Confederate canister. In the Crater itself, Potter's men dug footholds along the rim to afford a secure firing position. Howard Aston recalled the Georgians' charge from his position in the center of the Crater. As the force approached close to the rim to the left of its center, he "fired to the right oblique into the Georgians." A Federal artillery officer who also observed the charge of the Georgia Brigade remarked that "[t]he canister, pieces of shell and other missiles [*sic*] striking the slope (over which this charge was made) produced an effect upon it similar to the heavy drops of rain in a thunder shower falling upon a placid sheet of water." Their flank was thus exposed to this intense defensive fire, causing devastating losses among the advancing Georgians. Sergeant Stanley unloaded bucket after bucket of canister, "doing yeoman service on this last day of his life." Major Etheredge observed from his position on the Confederate line that "by the time the enemy had filled the breastworks as full of men as they could stand together, and as soon as the Georgians got near enough the enemy opened fire, and they fell like autumn leaves."

Under this terrific and deadly fire, wrought by the "heroic hundred riflemen who decorated the lip of the Crater," the Georgians began to swerve too far to the left, away from the intended target. Gordon McCabe observed that "so closely was every inch of the ground searched by artillery, so biting was the fire of musketry, that, obliquing to their left, they sought cover behind the cavalier-trench won by the Virginia brigade—many officers and men testifying by their blood how gallantly the venture had been essayed." Among those killed was Colonel John W. Evans of the 64th Georgia, although he was not in actual command that day. Seeing the line beginning to stagger under the withering fire which poured into the ranks of the regiment, Evans "sprang upon the breastworks, and waving his hat over his head shouted, in tones which rang distinctly over the tumult of battle: 'Remember, boys, you are Georgians,' and at that moment received the shot through his generous, noble heart, which almost instantly terminated the mortal existence of as gallant and amiable a man as ever lived or died." Hall's men were required to take cover in the traverses and bombproofs that had impeded their forward progress. Eventually, they were also driven out of these shelters, taking cover partially behind the ranks of the Virginia Brigade. A small portion of the Georgians rushed into Hartranft's fort with their hands in the air. A few others retreated back to the edge of the swale.<sup>23</sup> In such manner ended the first effort of the Georgians to retake the Crater.

As Mahone's first countercharge had gained momentum, the Federal troops were rapidly forced out of the forward trenches, and, while giving ground very grudgingly in many cases, they were soon forced to seek refuge in the Crater, which on first impression appeared like a safe, protected enclave. Little did they know what they were about to experience over the next several hours, as Mahone pressed up to the pit's very rim. With Davidson's Battery and Mahone's sharpshooters operating at full potential, those in the bloody pit soon found they were virtual prisoners there, as it was almost certain death to attempt a retreat back to the Federal lines.

General Hartranft, positioned in the undestroyed portion of the redoubt, and Generals

Bartlett and Griffin, in the Crater itself, held the remaining ground with fragments of four broken divisions. While Meade had suspended the assault and ordered the evacuation of the Crater and its environs by 9:30 A.M., the intense Confederate cross fire, combined with Mahone's storm of lead from the front and augmented by Haskell's efficient mortars, kept all but the really panic-stricken from attempting to retreat to the Federal lines. The Union forces in the Crater were quickly running out of ammunition after five hours of continuous fighting, and many began to gather cartridges from the dead, while others threw stones, bottles and other debris.

The two sides were so near in some places that many were cut by broken glass, bruised by rocks and stabbed by bayonets. Close-range fighting was virulent and unmerciful, and blood ran down in streams in the hard, brown clay, forming pools in which the men slipped. In many places, the Crater was a scene of unparalleled horror. In some areas, the panic-stricken soldiers were so tightly packed that they could not move or even raise their arms to defend themselves. Sergeant George Wakefield of the 9th New Hampshire recalled running the gauntlet to retrieve fresh supplies of cartridges: "My clothes were literally covered with bloody debris, and called forth many comments from the troops in the rear, but I quickly secured my cartridges and returned to the crater."

In the Crater, the first counterattack by the Virginians had finally been beaten back. The respite that followed gave Griffin's men time to consider flight, and they decided first to get into the Crater for protection and to assess their next move. Unfortunately, they did not realize how accurate Haskell's mortars were or how little coverage the pit actually afforded them. All seven of Griffin's regimental commanders had been killed, wounded or captured by this time, and few of their apparent successors were aware of their elevation, adding immensely to the confusion. Despite vastly inferior numbers, Mahone's men north and south of the Crater were in good order, "thus proving far more powerful despite their vastly inferior numbers," and the musketry and canister kept the Federals pinned on three sides. The Confederates threw up a barricade following the 20th Michigan's withdrawal into the Crater in order to prevent any further Yankee resurgence. The fort was now completely sealed off and the final work had begun. When the Georgians charged, Hartranft was able to blunt their charge before they could do serious damage to the Federals' confined position. "Sheets of blood were washing down the clay sides of the pit, pooling in ghostly puddles around the mounting stack of bodies." Only a few men at a time could gain footholds to fire out of the Crater with considerable effort before sliding down to reload.<sup>24</sup> However, the ultimate result was assured once Meade determined that a withdrawal was necessary.

By 11:00 A.M., the 51st Pennsylvania had taken back its old position in the Federal works. General Willcox, who had stockpiled a number of cases of cartridges within 200 yards of his front lines, detailed the 51st to transport this ammunition to the men in the beleaguered pit. The regiment's men divided into teams of four and piled as many cartridges as possible into the center of a shelter half. Picking up the shelter half by its corners, they raced through the fusillade of lead and steel which was no-man's-land. In this fashion, some 10,000 rounds of ammunition were ultimately delivered to Hartranft, although at a cost of a number of the brave men of the 51st. Some of these men were killed by Haskell's exploding mortar shells fully loaded with lead balls the size of Harpers Ferry musket shells, which exploded one hundred yards from the earth, throwing out the balls in all directions. Colonel William J. Bolton, the unit's commander, was hit in the face by one such blast and carried off the field dead.

The regiment's men clung to the hope that the tide of battle would still turn back in their favor. They could not believe that they had been abandoned in the pit, "in this mouth of an infernal Golgotha, to continue such a hopeless struggle alone," and they did not give up hope,

but as they viewed a large enemy force now massing, they were left to wonder: "[c]ould it be that 50,000 men would remain idle to their brutal slaughter?" For an hour after they entered the Crater, they believed that one gallant and determined assault from the main line would have carried the day, as the Rebel force was still weak in comparison, and thus they prayed for such a movement.<sup>25</sup>

At 11:00 A.M., Mahone ordered the Georgians to have another go at retaking the Crater as well as the undemolished fort to its south manned by Hartranft's improvised command. The Georgians' second assault met with no more success than its first, however, and they were again repulsed, having been met by "such a withering fire of shell and shot that they again recoiled with heavy loss." In the two charges, the 48th Georgia had forty-eight men killed and wounded. Its battle flag was pierced by 103 bullets, and its staff was cut in two on three separate occasions in the action. The 64th Georgia lost nine officers killed on the field, and seventy-nine men killed or wounded, most of them mortally.<sup>26</sup> While Mahone had not accomplished all that he had set out to, he could now realize that the Confederates were "masters of the situation." Utilizing two of his brigades, Mahone had immobilized three Federal corps. He was still eager to remove any doubt, however, before the Federals could heavily reinforce their troops.

The Ninth Corps was cowering leaderless in and around the Crater, Ord's men were driven back to the main Federal lines, and on the left, Warren's corps had never been able to mount an attack, largely due to the impression that Mahone was still in its front. The two brigades presented "an enfilading fire into the crater, and they made it very lively for us," Sergeant Howard Aston of the 13th Ohio Cavalry indicated. Added to this favorable situation, Mahone also had one more brigade yet to throw at the entrapped Yankees. Additionally, Wise's Brigade on the south side had pushed right up to the very rim of the Crater. Now the enemies were huddled on either side of the same embankment, and took to spearing each other by lofting abandoned fixed bayonets over the crest. Colonel McMasters later referred to this period as the "laziest fight I ever saw; we longed for hand grenades." The men were so close that they threw ignited artillery shells at the Federals packed in a dense mass in the Crater. Major Haskell, of course, kept up his incessant lobbing of mortar shells into the pit with deadly accuracy.<sup>27</sup>

The Federal assaulting forces had been cleared from the trenches everywhere. They were in a very poor position to defend themselves and suffered from a total lack of organization. To the left of the Crater, Hartranft had assumed the role as acting division commander. Sergeant Wesley Stanley of the 14th New York Heavy Artillery served as his chief of artillery, albeit with a total force of only two Confederate Napoleons, and was instrumental in fending off the two charges of the Georgia Brigade. In the Crater itself, General Simon Griffin had assumed the role of de facto commander of all other scattered commands in the Crater. William Bartlett, the only other general officer, was by this time totally incapacitated, his artificial cork leg having been totally destroyed as a result of Haskell's exploding mortar shells. He was thus unable to move and had to sit or lie immobile on the pit's floor among the dead and dying, "nonchalantly chomping a cigar, unable to aid them."

Hartranft had called for the 20th Michigan to come back into the undemolished fort to assist in stemming the current Federal rout caused by Mahone's initial counterassault. In obedience to this order, the regiment passed along the main trench and into the left of the fort. Before moving north, Sergeant Urie had experienced trouble holding the 20th Michigan's banner aloft, as "[i]t was continually struck by enemy slugs." The 20th, being Willcox's left-most regiment, was the last Union force in the works south of the Crater to move into the redoubt. As they moved to the right pursuant to Hartranft's orders, they found their fel-