

“. . . killed one man outright, blew another all to pieces. . . .”

Col. Charles S. Wainwright’s Account of Cooper’s Company B, 1st Pennsylvania Light Artillery on East Cemetery Hill: A Case of Mistaken Identity?

By Frank J. Piatek

On the late afternoon of July 2, 1863, as Confederate forces attacked the Federal left in the area of Devil’s Den, Little Round top, the Wheatfield, and Peach Orchard, another action was occurring on the right flank of the Federals on East Cemetery Hill. This was the artillery duel between the batteries of Col. Charles S. Wainwright’s and Maj. Thomas W. Osborne’s Federal First and Eleventh Corps’s artillery brigades and the guns under the command of the Confederate “Boy Major” Joseph W. Latimer located on Benner’s Hill to the northeast.

Among the batteries under Wainwright’s control was Battery B, 1st Pennsylvania Light Artillery, commanded by James H. Cooper. This artillery duel has often been overshadowed by events taking place on the Federal left. Although there have been recent studies of the artillery duel in conjunction with other operations on the Federal right flank, there has not been a critical examination of the rendition provided by Wainwright himself. His account has often been used as a primary source of what took place there, particularly with reference to Cooper’s battery.

Wainwright, commander of the First Corps’ artillery brigade at Gettysburg, kept journals of his experiences throughout the war. In 1961, during the centennial anniversary of the conflict, author Allan Nevins acquired them from a descendant, edited them, and the following year published them as *A Diary of Battle: The Personal Journals of Charles S. Wainwright, 1861-1865*. There is no question that Nevins’ work has provided Civil War readers with some of the most interesting and insightful accounts of the war. It also reflected Wainwright’s personality, being a man who did not shirk from supplying his own opinions of his observations. But his description of the artillery duel with Latimer’s guns on July 2 raises some questions that have yet to be with other factual circumstances involving Cooper’s battery on that occasion.

As the cannonade took place on July 2, Wainwright was seated on a stone wall which separated the guns of Capt. Michael Wiedrich’s Eleventh Corps battery from those of Cooper on Wiedrich’s right at the top of East Cemetery Hill. Wainwright was in proximity to the action and, presumably, had firsthand knowledge of what transpired.

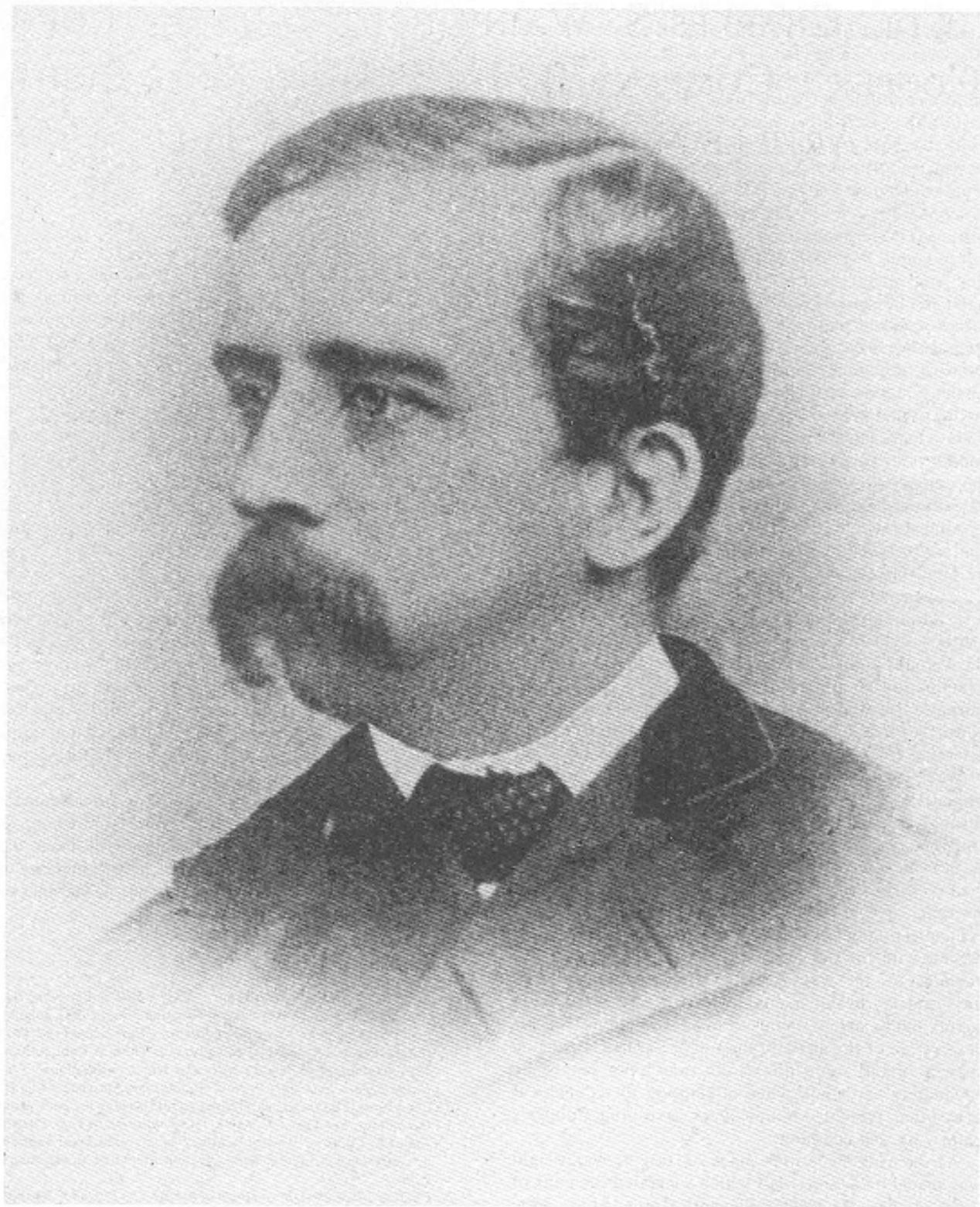
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Both batteries, along with others in the line, faced Benner’s Hill and were protected by shallow lunettes constructed by the men to help shield them from enemy fire. Cooper’s four 3-inch Ordnance rifles occupied the lunettes on the highest point of East Cemetery Hill in Wainwright’s artillery line and, as a consequence, became a prime target for Latimer’s batteries on Benner’s Hill. Accompanying Wainwright at his vantage point on the stone wall was Brig. Gen. Adelbert Ames of the Eleventh Corps’ infantry. Ames had taken over command of the First Division of that corps the previous day when Brig. Gen. Francis C. Barlow was wounded.

The effect of Confederate artillery fire from Benner’s Hill augmented by rounds coming in from as far as Seminary Ridge, focusing on Cemetery Hill, made the area around Cooper’s battery particularly vulnerable to death and destruction. Years later, James A. Gardner of the battery recounted the scene:

1. See: Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: Culp’s Hill & Cemetery Hill* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); John M. Archer, “The Hour Was One of Horror,” *East Cemetery Hill at Gettysburg* (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania: Thomas Publications, 1997); John D. Cox, *Culp’s Hill, the Attack and Defense of the Union Right Flank, July 2, 1863* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 2003). The author treated this issue in his book about the battery. See Frank J. Piatek, “*Cannoneers Top Your Posts!*” *James H. Cooper’s Battery B, First Pennsylvania Light Artillery at Gettysburg* (Chicora, Pennsylvania: Mechling Bookbindery, 2006).
2. Charles S. Wainwright, *A Diary of Battle: The Personal Journals of Charles S. Wainwright, 1861-1865*, ed. Allen Nevins (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962).
3. Wainwright, *A Diary of Battle*, pp. 243-44.



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Col. Charles S. Wineright witnessed Cooper's battery in action and recorded it in his journal.

. . . The shots of the enemy came thick and fast, bursting, crushing and ploughing, a mighty storm of iron hail, a most determined and terrible effort of the enemy to cripple and destroy the guns on the hill. Situated as we were in the center of the artillery line, our battery received the full force of the enemy's front, oblique and flank fire. Against the batteries on Seminary Ridge we were powerless; but upon the batteries of Latimer on Benner's Hill, and upon Graham and Raine to our left, an accurate and most telling fire was opened from the batteries on this hill [Cemetery Hill] and continued for about two hours.

One enemy shell struck and exploded at Cooper's No. 3 gun, killing or wounding every man servicing that piece. But before the casualties were cleared out, the gun was back in operation with a new crew. Wainwright described the action:

Here I had a specimen of the stuff this battery was composed of, and forgave Cooper and his men their utter unmilitariness and loose ideas of discipline in camp. So soon as the shell burst I jumped from the wall, and told Cooper to put on another detachment, that General Ames would let some of his men carry off the wounded; not a murmur was uttered, but five other men at once took place over their dead and wounded comrades, and fired before they could be removed. I was very proud of it.

As to the damage created by that Confederate shell, Wainwright stated:

The other was a shell which burst directly under Cooper's left gun, killed one man outright, blew another all to pieced, so that he died within half an hour, and wounded the other three. . . . The man who was so badly blown to pieces lost his right hand, his left arm at the shoulder, and his ribs so broken that you could see right into him; he was removed to the well, just inside the cemetery gates, and died there. Cooper came to me and asked permission for his brother, who was their bugler, to go and remain with him while he lived. . . .

The casualties for Cooper on that day included two men who were killed or died from their wounds. They were James H. McCleary and Peter G. Hoagland. Obviously, Wainwright must have been referring to them in recounting the effect of that Confederate shell. The problem is that neither individual had a brother in the battery nor did the bugler have a similar surname to either one of them. In addition, as will be discussed later, one

source had suggested that neither McCleary nor Hoagland were killed immediately nor did either die behind the cemetery gatehouse.

Harry W. Pfanz in his book, *Gettysburg: Culp's Hill & Cemetery Hill*, noted that he was unable to determine the identities of the brothers referred to by Wainwright. Gregory A. Coco in his book, *Killed in Action*, came right out and stated that the artilleryman who died behind the cemetery gatehouse was very likely McCleary.

When one reviews the battery's roster as found in Samuel P. Bates' History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers, as well as the one on the bronze plaque at the base of the Pennsylvania Memorial at Gettysburg, there is only one man having a similar surname to James H. McCleary. His name is Lee S. McCleary, and his was present with the battery at Gettysburg. But Lee S. McCleary was not a bugler nor was he James' brother.

James H. McCleary was the eldest son of William and Salinda McCleary of Little Beaver Township, Lawrence County, Pennsylvania. According to Salinda's obituary, she had nine children, only eight surviving her, James being killed at Gettysburg. In the 1860 census, all nine children are listed. Of those male siblings who were of military age other than James was a brother, John McCleary. There is a record of a John McCleary of Little Beaver Township who was a member of the 134th Pennsylvania Infantry, being discharged on May 26, 1863. But there is no record of his serving in Cooper's battery thereafter.

4. John P. Nicholson, *Pennsylvania at Gettysburg*, 2 vols. (Harrisburg: E. K. Myers State Printer, 1893), vol. 2, p. 881. Latimer had Grahams;s Rockbridge Virginia Artillery of four 20-pounder Parrott guns at his disposal. Raine's Lee Virginia Artillery was split with a 10-pounder Parrott and a 3-inch Ordnance rifle on the extreme left of Benner's Hill facing southwest. A section of two 20-pounders also belonging to Raine was located across the Hanover Road. This latter section of Raine's battery is the one referred to by Gardner in his narrative. Also see battlefield markers to the batteries on Benner's Hill and vicinity, Gettysburg National Military Park. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: Culp's Hill & Cemetery Hill*, p. 179.
5. Nicholson, *Pennsylvania at Gettysburg*, vol. 2, p. 881.
6. Wainwright, *A Diary of Battle*, p. 244.
7. Ibid., p. 243. Wainwright also alluded to this incident briefly in his report of the battle dated July 17, 1863. United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 70 vols. in 128 parts (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), series 1, vol. 27, pt. 1, p. 358.
8. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: Culp's Hill & Cemetery Hill*, p. 437, fn. 31; Gregory A. Coco, *Killed in Action* (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania: Thomas Publications, 1992), p. 55.
9. Samuel P. Bates, *History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 5 vols. (Harrisburg: E.K. Myers, State Printer, 1893), vol. 1, pp. 976-83. The battery's bugler at the time of Gettysburg was David Witherspoon according to the listing in Bates.
10. "Death Comes at Easter's Close," *The New Castle News* April 15, 1909, p. 8. the 1860 Census showed the following entries for the William McCleary family of Little Beaver Township: William, age 48 years; Salinda, Age 44 years; James, age 21 years; John, age 19 years; Mary, age 17 years; George, age 12 years;



Monument in Cooper's battery on East Cemetery Hill. In the background is the stone wall between Cooper's and Wiedrich's batteries where Colonel Wainwright was seated.

Lee S. McCleary, whose actual name was Leander Sample McCleary, was a corporal in the battery. His father was Samuel McCleary. Clearly, Lee was not a brother of James nor was he a bugler. There is no one else listed in the battery's roster with the surname of Hoagland to be a brother of Peter G. Hoagland. Therefore, whomever Wainwright referred to as a brother of the mortally wounded artilleryman cannot be ascertained, if he even existed.

A member of Capt. Robert Bruce Ricketts' battery may have provided some corroboration for Wainwright's account of the incident with respect to the physical injuries of one of the men. Ricketts arrived from the Artillery Reserve to relieve Cooper at the close of the duel, and one of his gunners found a severed hand which he buried on the lunette. Possibly it belonged to the man Wainwright described as having been blown to pieces.

Records, however, show that McCleary died after having had both legs amputated. Coco recognized that McCleary's legs were amputated but indicated that the injury to his legs was in addition to the others specifically mentioned by Wainwright. It would be unusual that such

an injury would have escaped Wainwright's observation, though, given his particular description of the other wounds. It would also be strange for surgeons to amputate legs of an artilleryman so badly wounded as described by Wainwright when his mortality was already certain.

Catherine, age 10 years; William, age 8 years; Elliot, age 6 years; Joseph, age 3 years; Charles, age 10 months. *The Lawrence Journal* issue of July 11, 1863, referred to James McCleary's death at Gettysburg whose father was William McCleary of Little Beaver Township. S.W. Durant and P.A. Durant, *History of Lawrence County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts and Company, 1877; reprint, Evansville, Indiana: Uningraphic, Inc. 1976), pp. 218-19.

11. Last Will and Testament of Samuel McCleary probated in Lawrence County, Pennsylvania in 1858. See: Lawrence County Will Book, vol. 1, p. 404, where there is a specific bequest to Leander Sample McCleary.
12. Pfanz, *Gettysburg, Culp's Hill & Cemetery Hill*, pp. 252-53.
13. John W. Busey, *The Last Full Measure: Burials in the Soldier's National Cemetery at Gettysburg* (Hightstown, New Jersey: Longstreet House, 1988) p. 168: Coco, *Killed in Action*, p. 55.



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Latimer's position on Beaver's Hill. To the left of the plaque can be seen the Holiday Inn water tower. Cooper's battery was located just south (left) of the water tower.

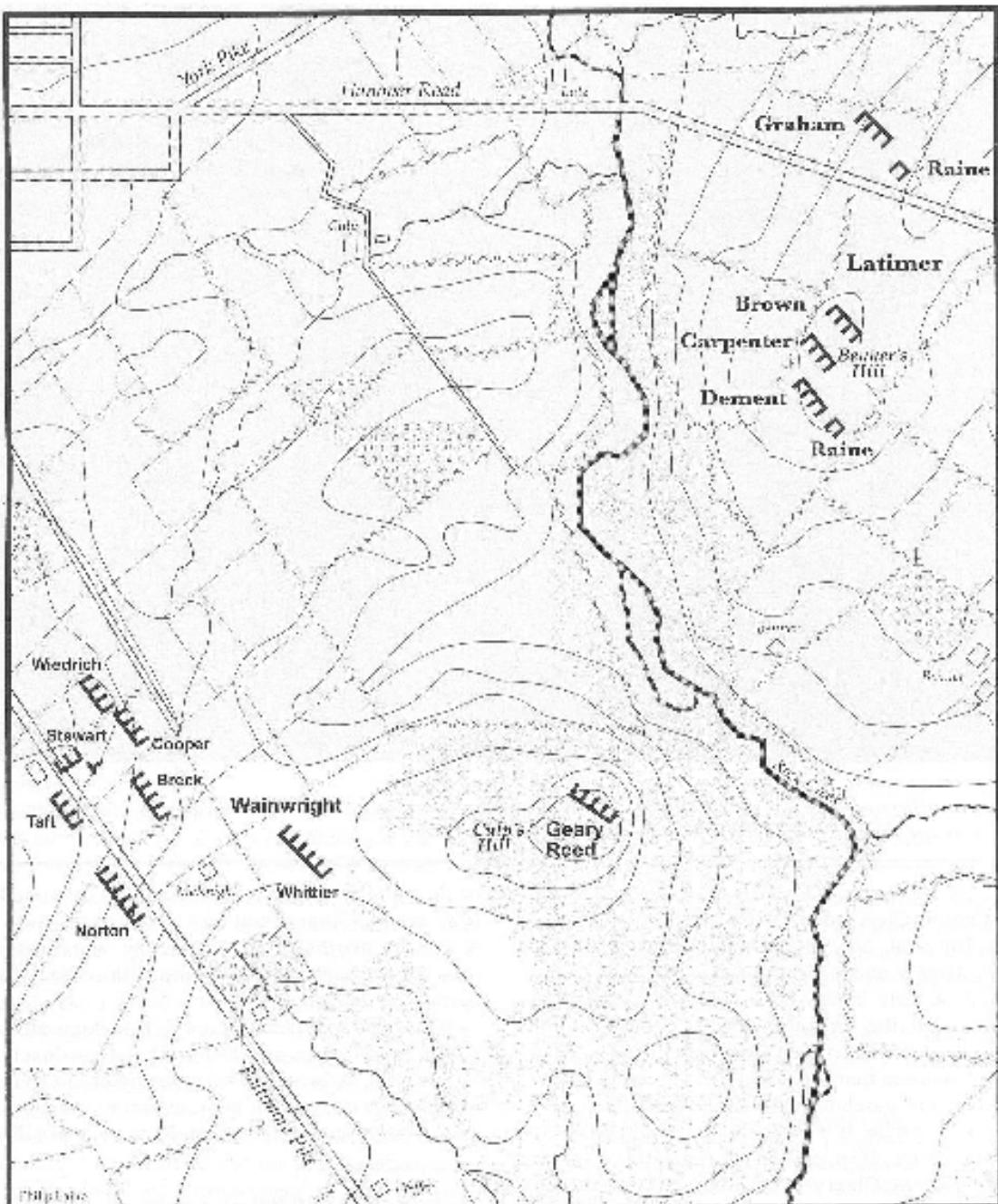
John W. Busey had undertaken the project of compiling the identities of Union soldiers killed at Gettysburg in his book, *The Last Full Measure*. He indicated that McCleary died at the Artillery Brigade, First Corps Hospital. According to Coco in his books, *A Vast Sea of Misery* and *A Strange and Blighted Land*, that hospital on July 2 was located in the vicinity of White Church off the Baltimore Pike, a considerable distance south of the Evergreen Cemetery gatehouse.

Busey did mention that six amputated legs were found in the area of the gatehouse by Elizabeth Thorn, the cemetery sexton's wife. It is possible that a field hospital was there at the time. If so, perhaps the amputations took place there, and McCleary later died at the Artillery Brigade Hospital farther south. After the battle, Thorn, who was six months pregnant, had the difficult task of burying ninety-one soldiers in the Evergreen Cemetery. One of them was James H. McCleary. If he died at the Artillery Brigade Hospital, then he was transported back to the cemetery for burial. This is corroborated somewhat by an account of James P. Alcorn's experiences in returning to the battlefield to look for his own brother's body who had died from wounds on July 1. Both were members of Company B. After Alcorn found his brother's

body, he and his father went looking for other members of the battery who were killed or died of wounds. They located McCleary, but not Hoagland. Both James Alcorn's brother and McCleary were interred in proximity to each other by Thorn with consecutive burial permit numbers.

Busey indicated that Peter G. Hoagland died on July 4 and so he was not either the man described by Wainwright as being killed immediately of dying at the gatehouse within a half hour, assuming Busey's sources are correct. According to him, Hoagland also died at the Artillery

14. Busey, *The Last Full Measure*, p. 168; Gregory A. Coco, *A Vast Sea of Misery* (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania: Thomas Publications, 1988), pp. 83-84; Gregory A. Coco, *A Strange and Blighted Land, Gettysburg: The Aftermath of a Battle* (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania: Thomas Publications, 1995), p. 193.
15. Busey, *The Last Full Measure*, p.xxv; Transcription of Recollections of James P. Alcorn, Gettysburg National Military Park Library; Busey, *The Last Full Measure*, pp. 165, 168. See Conclusion for a further discussion of James P. Alcorn's experiences in returning to the battlefield to look for his brother's gravesite. Both Alexander P. Alcorn and James H. McCleary are buried in Area C, of the Evergreen Cemetery behind the gatehouse in individually marked graves with their names and unit identifications.



Map by Philip Ladd

Federal guns on East Cemetery Hill

Cooper, Battery B, 1st Pennsylvania
 Norton, Battery H, 1st Ohio
 Brock, Battery L, 1st New York
 Stewart, Battery B, 2nd United States
 Taft, 5th New York Battery
 Wiedrich, Battery I, 1st New York (4)

Federal guns on Steven's Knoll

Whittier, Battery E, 5th Maine

Federal guns on Culp's Hill

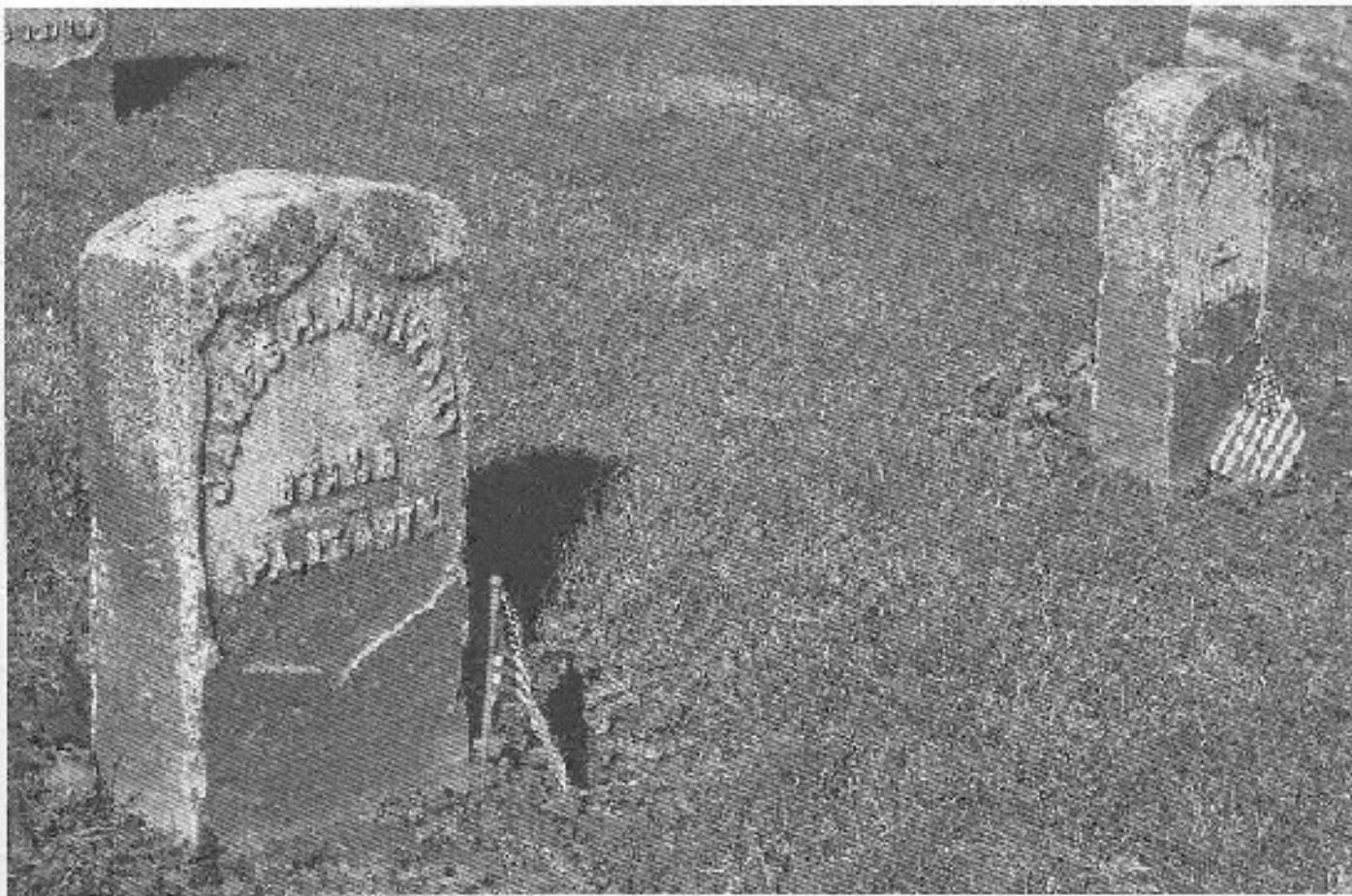
Geary, Battery E, Pennsylvania Light (3)
 Reed, Battery K, 5th United States (2)

Confederate guns on Benner's Hill

Raine, Lee Battery (2)
 Dement, 1st Maryland Battery
 Carpenter, Alleghany Artillery
 Brown, Chesapeake Artillery

Confederate guns north of Hanover Road

Raine, Lee Battery (2)
 Graham, Rockbridge Artillery



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The graves of James H. McCleary (left) and Alexander P. Alcorn in Evergreen Cemetery.

Brigade, First Corps Hospital. Hoagland was initially buried on the George Spangler farm between the Taneytown Road and the Baltimore Pike, south of the Granite Schoolhouse Road. Later, he was interred at the German Reformed Church Cemetery on the edge of town until 1901 when he was disinterred and reburied in the Soldiers' National Cemetery adjacent to the Evergreen Cemetery where McCleary was buried.

CONCLUSION

When one judges the credibility of any witness of source, there is always the inference that if the account is wrong in certain particulars, or if portions of the story cannot be reconciled with other known facts, then the entire rendition is suspect. But there is also the possibility that some of what is stated is reliable, notwithstanding factual discrepancies.

Many things happened to Wainwright on July 2. There were instances in which he, himself, was nearly killed. In the kaleidoscopic drama of battle, it is natural that recollections can be faulty or episodes from different times or places can merge together. Perhaps for some reason Cooper might have misrepresented the relationship between the battery's bugler and the individual who was mortally wounded, or maybe Wainwright was simply

confused.

Even though Elizabeth Thorn buried McCleary in an area in the Evergreen Cemetery less than a hundred yards beyond the gatehouse, one cannot infer that he died there. The burials undertaken by Thorn did not start until July 6. As mentioned previously, Alexander P. Alcorn, who was mortally wounded on July 1 west of town, was initially buried near the Seminary by his brother James P. Alcorn. James was captured and subsequently paroled but managed to get away from the provost guard. After the armies left the area, he returned with his father to look for his brother's body. Once he was found, they disinterred

16. Pennsylvania Section of the Soldiers; National Cemetery, Row G, No. 28; Busey, *The Last Full Measure*, p. 137; John W. Busey, *These Honored Dead: The Union Casualties at Gettysburg* (Highstown, New Jersey: Longstreet House, 1996), p. 304.
17. He carelessly walked in front of the muzzle of a gun about to fire and fortunately escaped injury when a shell that plowed into the ground detonated out of its entrance hole rather than straight up where he was standing. When a shot killed or wounded a dozen of soldiers behind the stone wall, the impact was so close that Wainwright was covered with dust. Wainwright, *Diary of a Battle*, pp. 243-44.

Alexander's remains and brought the body to the Evergreen Cemetery at the time Thorn had begun her work. They also located McCleary's body, possibly at the Artillery Brigade Hospital if Busey's source is correct. Alexander Alcorn's burial permit number is 391 in the same area where McCleary's number is 392. Both were interred on July 9. If James P. Alcorn's account is believed, then the Alcorns brought McCleary's body to Thorn for burial along with Alexander's. Therefore, it is quite conceivable that McCleary, like Alexander Alcorn, died elsewhere and eventually was brought to the Evergreen Cemetery to repose there.

Additionally, given the fact that the Alcorn brothers were siblings in the battery, one of whom was mortally wounded, it is possible that Wainwright confused what happened on July 1 when Alexander was mortally wounded and tended by his brother, with what happened the following day. This may be so even though James P. Alcorn, a sergeant with the battery, was not a bugler.

With respect to the place and time of death, maybe Wainwright only assumed that the man so badly blown to pieces on July 2 was taken to the back of the gatehouse and died there within a half hour. Since Wainwright was

actively involved in the operations of his batteries on that day, it is unlikely that he would have left the area to take note of what happened to one of the casualties. It is also plausible that he was distracted by the severe cannonade.

Presently, these issues regarding Wainwright's journal entry involving the two men of Cooper's battery who died on July 2 might seem to tarnish the luster of his account for some readers, not only in this instance, but in general. As a result, one might cast aspersions on its entire veracity. That is unfortunate. Wainwright's rendition merely raises some unanswered questions that compel further investigation. The author here welcomes readers of this article to posit answers and, if available, provide other evidence of the identities of the two men whom Wainwright described.

18. Busey, *The Last Full Measure*, pp. 165, 168. See Transcription of Recollections of James P. Alcorn, Gettysburg National Military Park Library; Piatek, "Cannoneers, to Your Posts!" pp. 13, 26-27.