

## DOG OF WAR: R.I. NATIVE SAVED UNION ARMY AT GETTYSBURG

Westerly Sun, The (RI)-July 8, 2012

Author: SAM SIMONS

Editor's Note: This is part of a biweekly series on Rhode Island's role in the Civil War by former Sun staff writer Sam Simons.

Special to The Sun

Brig. Gen. George Sears Greene stood atop Culp's Hill late in the afternoon of July 2, 1863. Behind him, the bulk of the 12th Corps was marching off towards the smoke and thunder that marked the embattled left flank of the Union army, leaving his brigade of 1,300 New Yorkers to hold the Union right flank.

The Union Army of the Potomac was stretched nearly two miles along Cemetery Ridge, near the small Pennsylvania town of Gettysburg. Its left flank rested on the Round Tops and the right flank curved back like a fishhook, anchored on Culp's Hill. Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee had spent the better part of the afternoon trying to crush the Union left on this second day of battle. Union commander Major Gen. George Meade had been feeding in reinforcements from all along the line in an effort to stall the Confederate attack. Finally, around 6 p.m., Meade gambled that Lee had fed all his troops into the attack on the left and the right flank would be safe.

Meade was wrong.

Greene's brigade formed the "barb" of the fishhook, just 400 yards in front of the Baltimore Pike. The road ran along the rear of the Union line, providing access to the army's supply wagons and Meade's headquarters. If Lee could break through, he could destroy the Union army, and then march his army to Washington, D.C. and end the war.

Even as Greene watched the rest of the 12th Corps disappear into the trees behind Culp's Hill, four brigades of Confederates from the Division of Maj. Gen. Edward Johnson began to advance up the hill. The New Yorkers were stretched in a single line, with no reserves. Fortunately, Greene had insisted on having his men dig in when they arrived that morning, and the rocky wooded hill provided plenty of material for building entrenchments. "The first thing he (Greene) did was, he said we need to dig in," said Paul Bouget, who portrays Greene at Civil War related events throughout Rhode Island. "He was a West Point-trained engineer and ordered his men to each carry a shovel, a pick and an axe with them."

George Greene was born and raised in Rhode Island, his family among the founders of the Rhode Island colony and Revolutionary War hero Nathaniel Greene among his ancestors. Called "My Dog of War" by his commander earlier in the war, Greene displayed the taciturn attitude of a New England native.

"The guy was an absolute fighter," Bouget said. "He was a Swamp Yankee. He didn't say a thing [as the rest of the corps marched away]; all he wanted to do was kill rebels."

Four times the Rebels charged his line over the next four hours. Darkness descended and the fighting continued with both sides reduced to firing at muzzle flashes as what was left of the 5,000 Confederate

attackers knelt behind rocks and trees. Eventually, units from the 11th and 1st Corps arrived to support Greene and the attack was finally called off around 10 p.m.

The bolstered 12th Corps fought for seven more hours on the next morning, expending so much ammunition that trees on the slopes of Culp's Hill were cut in half by the firing.

"The Official Records omitted details of Culp's Hill," Bouget said of the aftermath. "Meade would have had to admit that he put the army in danger by stripping the right flank and Lee wouldn't admit that he had been stopped by a single brigade."

Pickett's Charge and the defense of Little Round Top are more familiar to people today, but an unheralded Rhode Island native and his men on Culp's Hill deserve just as much credit for the Union victory at Gettysburg.

Copyright 2012, Westerly Sun, The (RI), All Rights Reserved.