

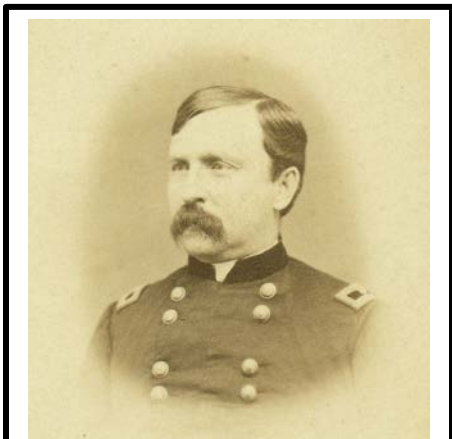
## CONFEDERATE GOPHERS STARTLE A MAINE CAPTAIN

Brian Swartz

Amidst the shot and shell flying both ways on the Chambersburg Pike on Wednesday, July 1, 1863, Capt. James Abram Hall suddenly discovered a gopher problem occurring on his right flank.

A trader with personal real estate worth \$1,650, Hall lived in Damariscotta in 1860 with his 20-year-old wife, Roxanna, and their 1-year-old daughter, Luncy. Though not a warrior born, he joined the Midcoast artillery battery raised by Davis Tillson, an East Thomaston (later Rockland) native whose West Point education ended abruptly with a leg wound and amputation.

Winning election to the Maine Legislature in 1857, Tillson became Governor Lot Morrill's adjutant general in 1858; Tillson's subsequent report about Maine's decrepit militia system offers stunning insight into how far the state's martial behavior had fallen since the "Bloodless" Aroostook War.



After joining the 2<sup>nd</sup> Maine Battery as a first lieutenant, James Abram Hall of Damariscotta became its captain in spring 1862 and led the battery during the battles of Cedar Mountain, Fredericksburg, and Gettysburg. He displayed a cool reserve when under fire. (Maine State Archives)

Maneuvering on a cork prosthetic, Tillson took his battery to war. His May 1862 promotion to major and assignment as divisional artillery chief elevated Hall to captain on May 22, 1862. He commanded the 2nd Maine Battery at Cedar Mountain and Fredericksburg; he dismounted from his horse during the latter battle to sight a 3-inch rifle on a particularly obnoxious Confederate cannon. Hall's first shot silenced that gun.

By Gettysburg the 2nd Maine Battery belonged to I Corps' Artillery Brigade, commanded by Col. Charles P. Wainwright. Over Monday night, June 30, 1863, Hall supported infantry guarding a Marsh Creek bridge between Emmitsburg and Gettysburg.

When Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds started I Corps toward Adams County early on Tuesday, the 2nd Maine Battery followed the vanguard 1st Division (Brig. Gen. James G. Wadsworth) northeast on the Emmitsburg Road.

"I was the advance of the Artillery of the Army of the Potomac," said Hall, apparently unaware that 1st Lt. John H. Calef and his Battery A, 2nd U.S. Artillery (Cavalry Corps) had already duelled with Confederate artillery.

After meeting with John Buford near the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Reynolds rode south and met Wadsworth near the Codori Farm on the Emmitsburg Road. Soldiers tore apart fences opposite the farm, and Hall took

his battery into the farm fields “about a half mile south and west of town” and pounded approximately northwest toward the fighting.

Reynolds met Hall around 10:15 a.m. and “selected the position for the Battery, on the right of [north] and near the Chambersburg Pike,” Hall said. “It commanded the approaches” along the road “and overlooked . . . a broad and beautiful expanse of country, which rises and falls in gentle slopes of fields, pastures and forests as far as” South Mountain “to the west and north.”

As they stood their horses at the McPherson Ridge site, Reynolds and Hall could see “the deploying columns of [Harry] Heth’s division”

swarming on Herr Ridge to the northwest, Hall said, and “nearly twenty Confederate cannon” spread along “a ridge to the westward.”

“Pay your attention to those guns and draw their fire from our infantry while it is deploying,” Reynolds said before riding away to meet his death at McPherson’s Woods.

“Galloping to the position,” the 2nd Maine Battery arrived at “a critical moment . . . upon the field.” Hall spread his ordnance rifles in three sections — right, center, and left — with the rightmost cannon unlimbering first and the others following sequentially. Reinforced by 38 enlisted men detached from the 16th Maine Infantry Regiment, the gunners swung their rifles around and sent the horse teams a short distance to the rear.

Hall “naturally took position” on the left flank, “nearer the Chambersburg Pike.” His attention on the banging Southern artillery, he thought that “apparently the field extending away” to his right flank “was smooth and unbroken,” the “un-mown grass” stretching to the north.

The 2nd Maine Battery had apparently approached from an angle obscuring the unfinished railroad from Hall’s view. Construction workers had blasted three cuts through the rocks while extending the rail bed west from Gettysburg. Unlimbering near the Middle Cut — deeper than a tall man stood and featuring sides angling upwards around 45 degrees or so — Hall noticed few, if any trees or bushes growing along the railroad cut’s edge to suggest that a stream or *something* lay on his right.



The 2nd Maine Battery survivors erected a monument where the unit deployed alongside the Chambersburg Road in late morning on Wednesday, July 1, 1863. The original monument included two flank markers; the two cannons replicate the 3-inch ordnance rifles used by the 2nd Maine Battery. Its location between the John Reynolds and John Buford monuments gives the Maine monument high exposure to battlefield visitors. (Brian F. Swartz Photo)



When he unlimbered his 2<sup>nd</sup> Maine Battery alongside the Chambersburg Road outside Gettysburg on July 1, 1863, Capt. James A. Hall was unaware that an unfinished railroad cut ran past his right flank. Mississippi infantrymen advancing east along the so-called Middle Cut popped up its south bank (left) and laced the 2<sup>nd</sup> Maine Battery with lead. (BFS)

His rifles now deployed “some 400 yards from Seminary Hill,” Hall targeted a six-gun Confederate battery “directly in our front at 1,300 yards distance.” The enemy guns “concentrated upon me . . . but with very little effect.”

“We opened . . . with shot and shell at 10.45 a.m., our first six shots” forcing two guns and their crews “under cover behind a barn,” Hall said.

Reynolds had sent Brig. Gen. Lysander Cutler and his 2nd Brigade to McPherson Ridge. Cutler, a Massachusetts native who had flogged

recalcitrant Dexter schoolchildren into obedience his first day as a teacher years earlier, placed two regiments to Hall’s left and the other three regiments to Hall’s right, beyond the railroad cut.

Against those regiments and Hall’s battery advanced the brigade of Brig. Gen. Joseph R. Davis, a Mississippi lawyer and Jefferson Davis’s nephew. His right (south) flank abutting the Chambersburg Pike (modern Route 30), Davis deployed two Mississippi regiments and a North Carolina regiment from right to left and, with “skirmishers thrown forward,” attacked.

Cutler “found myself engaged with a vastly superior force of the enemy, advancing in two lines, at short range, in front and on my right flank . . . the three regiments under my command fought as only brave men can fight, and held their ground”

until Wadsworth ordered them to retreat to Seminary Ridge. The 42nd Mississippi Infantry funneled into the railroad cut. Meanwhile, the 2nd Maine Battery pounded at the Confederate artillery on Herr Ridge. Suddenly, some 25 minutes “from the time we opened fire” (as Hall recollected), 2nd Lt. Benjamin



Soldiers from the 42nd Mississippi Infantry Regiment had this view of the 2nd Maine Battery's position when they scrambled up the unfinished railroad's Middle Cut on July 1, 1863. The visible John Reynolds monument stands behind the battery's monument. (BFS)

F. Carr yelled that Confederates had appeared about 60 yards from the rightmost ordnance rifle and crew.

Moving unseen along the railroad bed, the Mississippians suddenly scrambled up its southern side like so many homespun-clad gophers popping from their holes. The Confederates started shooting.

Spurring his horse, the disbelieving Hall rode quickly to the right section commanded by 1st Lt. William Ulmer and confirmed that “a column of the enemy’s infantry [had] charged up a ravine on our right flank.”

Ulmer ordered his two gun crews to load “double-shotted canister.” Gunners swung their ordnance rifles about 90 degrees — Hall’s center section was also turning toward the cut by now — and fired. The canister “sent the Confederates tumbling back into the cut,” but Southerners hidden “behind such natural protection as the ground afforded” started “shooting down my horses and wounding my men,” Hall said.

And “just at this moment, to my surprise I saw my [infantry] support falling back without any order having been given me to retire,” he said. Cutler was withdrawing, and Wadsworth thought not to tell Hall.

He ordered his battery “to retire by section,” with Ulmer’s two rifles going first to find a position so the gunners could unlimber and cover the other two sections. The Mississippians shot down four horses hauling one cannon; Ulmer’s men rolled it away by hand.

“The only way open for a retreat was through the field between the pike and [the] railroad cut,” Hall realized. The center section withdrew, but “as the last piece [in the left section] . . . was coming away, all its horses were shot. Many [horses] . . . were not shot but bayoneted[,] that it was a close and desperate struggle for our guns.”

Leaving the 3-inch rifle with its dead horses still in harness, Hall soon planned “to return for it myself,” but Wadsworth ordered him “to lose no time,” withdraw through Gettysburg, and unlimber “on the [Cemetery Hill] heights, to cover the retiring” I Corps.

Hall “sent a sergeant and 5 men” to retrieve the cannon, but regretfully “all of them were wounded or taken prisoner.”

Confusing orders from Wadsworth returned the 2nd Maine Battery to a position near the Lutheran Theological Seminary and finally sent Hall et al toward the advancing Confederates. Seeking a place to deploy his rifles, Hall finally ran into Wainwright, who had already countermanded one Wadsworth order.

Wainwright ordered the battery back to Cemetery Hill. Before withdrawing, Hall “took a limber . . . with 1 sergeant . . . and recovered the abandoned gun with parts of all the harness.” The 2nd Maine Battery “immediately moved back

through the town” and, “by order of General [Oliver Otis] Howard,” deployed at Evergreen Cemetery’s western edge.

“We got badly hurt,” said Hall, reporting 22 men and 36 horses lost “in about an hour and a half.

“The boys fought like the d\*\*\*\* never better,” he wrote Maine Adjutant Gen. John L. Hodsdon. “I have seen hard fighting before and been badly smashed up, but I never saw a battery taken from the field and its guns saved in so bad a state as the Old Second came off that day.”<sup>1</sup>

Sources: James Abram Hall Soldier’s File, Maine State Archives; U.S. 1860 Census for Damariscotta; Hall’s Second Maine Battery, *Maine at Gettysburg*, pp. 15-17; Capt. James A. Hall, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series 1, Vol. 27, Part 1, No. 72, p. 359-360; Col. Joseph R. Davis, *OR*, Vol. 27, Part 1, No. 553, p. 649; Brig. Gen. Lysander Cutler, *OR*, Vol. 27, Part 1, No. 37, p. 282; Capt. James A. Hall, letter to Maine Adj. Gen. John L. Hodsdon, July 11, 1863, MSA (underlined in the original)

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<sup>1</sup> Hall, *OR*, Vol. 27, Part 1, No. 72, p. 359-360; Hall to Hodsdon, July 11, 1863, MSA (underlined in the original).