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Abstract

In the 1860s Gettysburg had a population of around 2,400. The Culps had lived there since 1787, the year Christopher Culp purchased the farm, located on the east end of town, with its western boundry starting at Baltimore St. between Breckenridge and South Streets, going northeast to South Stratton St. and Wall Alley East, then on to East Middle St. between South Stratton and Liberty Streets. The town more or less ended at the farm boundary. Prominent on the farm and southeast of town was Culp's Hill. Five generations of Culps had lived in Gettysburg by the time of the battle. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Adams County Historical Society, ACHS, Adams County, Pennsylvania History, Civil War, Battle of Gettysburg, Gettysburg, Culp

Some Culp Family Members in the Civil War

by David A. Culp

In the 1860s Gettysburg had a population of around 2,400. The Culp family had lived there since 1787, the year Christopher Culp purchased the farm, located on the east end of town, with its western boundary starting at Baltimore St. between Breckenridge and South Streets, going northeast to South Stratton St. and Wall Alley East, then on to East Middle St. between South Stratton and Liberty Streets. The town more or less ended at the farm boundary. Prominent on the farm and southeast of town was Culp's Hill. Five generations of Culp family had lived in Gettysburg by the time of the battle.¹

There are many references to the Culp family in much of what has been written about the Battle of Gettysburg and the Second Battle of Winchester, often with brother fighting brother.

Henry Culp (of Peter) owned the farm and was the third generation to do so by the time of the battle. On the second and third days of the battle, the farm and barn were behind Confederate lines and were used as hospitals by Johnson's and Early's troops. Culp's Hill was held by the Union troops throughout the battle and played a major role during the fighting. It formed part of the right flank which anchored the "barb" end of the Union "fishhook-shaped" battle lines.

Culp family members also played important roles on both sides during the war. Henry's brother, Peter Jr., gave directions to General Reynolds when the general arrived in town on 1 July, looking for General Buford. Peter showed him how to get to the Seminary Building where Buford was then known to be located.²

David and William Culp (fourth generation) were in the 87th Regiment, Company F, Pennsylvania Volunteers, which was recruited in Adams county. Wesley Culp, William's brother (both were David's first cousins), fought on the Confederate side with the Second Virginia Infantry (General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's unit, the Stonewall Brigade).

Wesley Culp, born in York Springs and raised in Gettysburg in the 1840s and 1850s, worked for C. William Hoffman, a Gettysburg carriage-maker. When Hoffman decided to move his shop to Shepherdstown, Virginia, Wesley went with him. He was around 16 years old at the time. In Shepherdstown he joined the militia, which in 1861 was absorbed as Company B into the Second Virginia Infantry.³



Fig. 1: Wesley Culp.

The 87th Pennsylvania Volunteers Regiment was employed from September 1861 as a sort of railroad-transported unit guarding the Northern Central Railroad from the Pennsylvania line to Baltimore.³ In 1862 it participated in various skirmishes and marches from Baltimore to western Virginia riding and guarding the railroads. Its job was to pursue enemy troops in the area. By December 1862, they had marched to the Baltimore, western Virginia and Winchester, Va., areas, performing duties usually executed by cavalry, scouting for information and pursuing the enemy. They went into winter quarters at Win-

chester on January 2, 1863, until May. Picket duty during the winter was very severe. The cavalry force was too small for the service required, and scouting parties had to be kept out constantly on all roads leading to Winchester. This service while in winter quarters was equal in hardship to active campaigning.⁴

Winchester was important because of its strategic location in the Shenandoah Valley, the eastern "breadbasket" of the Confederacy and a principal route of communication. It was a crossroads town such as Gettysburg, but it proved virtually indefensible. The town changed hands 72 times and was the scene of three major battles.⁵

The Second Battle of Winchester (also called the Battle of Carter's Woods) was a prelude to the Battle of Gettysburg. It was necessary to drive Union forces out so that Lee's Army of Northern Virginia could invade Pennsylvania unopposed. General Richard S. "Baldy" Ewell's 2nd Corps was given the job of clearing the valley. He commanded a large and confident force of battle-tested veterans, which included the 2nd Virginia. The 87th Regiment was part of the Union force occupying Win-

chester. This led to the military confrontation on June 12-15, 1863, where three Culp's were involved, giving rise to one of the poignant stories of brother-fighting-brother. It also resulted in the tragic love story of Jennie Wade and Jack Skelly.

The fighting began on June 13, in front of Winchester. Throughout the day the 87th was engaged on the skirmish line between the Front Royal and Strasburg roads. It was then moved back to the fortifications on the north-western side of the town. On the 14th, in the retreat, the 87th was third in the order of march. Four miles out, when the head of the column was attacked from Carter's Woods with artillery and infantry, it immediately formed and charged, but was repulsed. Three times it moved upon the enemy's lines, but could not break them, and in the last charge, organized resistance collapsed and the troops scattered to avoid capture.⁶

Salome Myers, who lived on West High St., wrote the following entry in her diary on June 19, 1863: "Some of our boys from the 87th just got home. They were in a battle in Winchester, Virginia last Sunday. Uncle Wm. Culp and cousin David Myers are among them. The boys retreated, their ammunition gave out and they made for home. Poor fellows. They have been on the road since Monday evening."

Another diarist, Sally Broadhead, who lived on Chambersburg St., wrote that "they say the 87th Pennsylvania got a terrible beating at Winchester a few days ago. Some were saying a Captain, two Lieutenants and a lot of other men rumored that some of the men were coming in on the Chambersburg Pike, and not long after about a dozen of those who lived in town came in and their report relieved some and agonized



Fig. 2: Jack Skelly.



Fig. 3: Jennie Wade.

others.” David Culp was among the captured but was not wounded. Jack Skelly was also among the captured, but he had been wounded. After the battle, Wesley Culp, who heard that prisoners were taken from the 87th, went to see if any were from Company F. Although we are not told if he saw David, he did meet Jack Skelly. Wes convinced a doctor to look at Jack, who was receiving no medical attention. While talking to Wes, Jack asked him to deliver a message to his sweetheart Jennie Wade in Gettysburg if he passed that way.⁷

The Army of Northern Virginia made good its invasion of Pennsylvania and marched to Gettysburg unopposed until July 1, 1863. On July 2nd Wesley Culp was part of the force trying to take Culp’s Hill. At night after the fighting had stopped, Wes obtained a pass to visit his sisters, Ann and Julia, and to deliver Jack Skelly’s message. He found that Jennie Wade was at her sisters house, which was between the battle lines and therefore could not be reached. He said he would try again the following day. Battles, however, often interfere with human beings in tragic ways, and Gettysburg did so more than most: next day both Wesley Culp and Jennie Wade were killed, and Jack Skelly died of his wound on July 12th. The “lover’s message” would have to be delivered elsewhere.⁸

Meanwhile, prisoner-of-war David Culp had been marched 15 to 23 June, from Winchester to Richmond. In Richmond he was incarcerated in Libby Prison, an old candle factory and tobacco warehouse, which enjoyed notoriety for suffering and degradation surpassed only by the infamous Andersonville.⁹

On July 14, 1863 David was included in a prisoner exchange at City Point, Virginia, and then taken to Camp Parole near Annapolis, Mary-

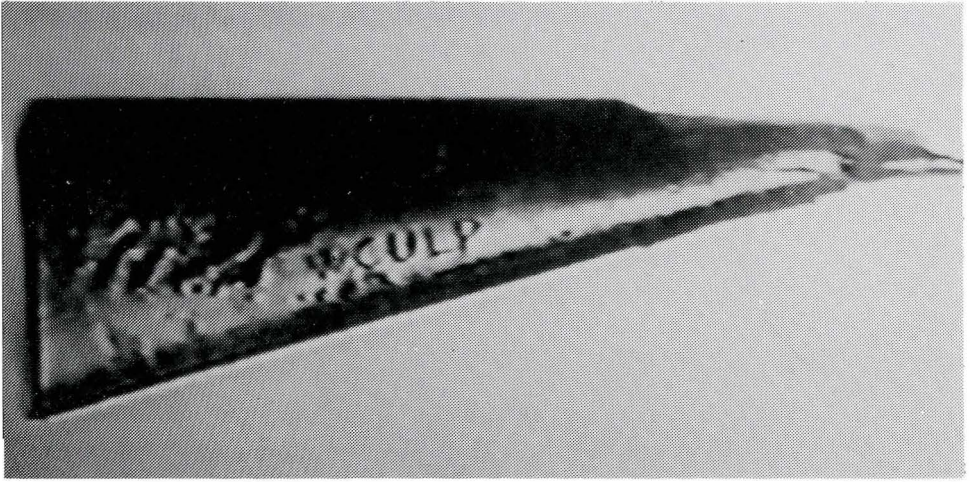


Fig. 4: Wesley Culp's Gun Stock, Showing the Inscription "WCULP."

land. He was captured in mid-June, marched as a prisoner for 9 days to Richmond, thrown in Libby Prison and, half starved on corn meal and, ill treated, contracted a cold, chills and rheumatism.¹⁰ A couple weeks previous the greatest battle ever fought in America was fought in the backyard of his childhood home. He knew nothing of his family, and they knew nothing of him. Later events suggest he must have concluded, "The hell with this, I'm going home": on July 28, 1863, he deserted.

He returned home in August and September. The stench from rotting flesh (men and horses) still hung over the whole town, and destruction was everywhere to be seen. Homes, churches, schools, barns and warehouses were filled with the wounded, and the townspeople were helping to care for them. It is conceivable David was involved, as was his family, in helping and cleaning up. His daughter, Gertrude Oakley Culp, was born the next year, on May 11, 1864, so we may infer that he was enjoying home life.

David reported back to his unit October 7, 1863. It was not unusual to walk home when things became difficult or went awry, which is what many of his fellow comrades in Company F did after the Winchester battle, where he was captured. It seems also that he knew little of what was happening because the 87th had had no contact with the enemy until October 26, 1863, at Bealton Station, at which time he was back. Prior to Bealton Station, the last engagement had occurred on July 23, 1863, at Manassas Gap, when he was still prisoner at Camp Parole.¹¹



Fig. 5: David Culp.

In any event, he had returned in time for the fall campaign when the 87th was attached to the 3rd Brigade, 3rd Division of the 3rd Corps. During the fall campaign it also fought the enemy at Kelly's Ford (November 7), Brandy Station (November 8), Locust Grove (November 27), and Mine Run (November 30).¹²

At the close of the fall campaign 1863, the 87th went into winter quarters at Brandy Station. During the winter the 3rd Corps was broken up because of its heavy casualties, and the 87th was assigned to the 1st Brigade, 3rd Division, 6th Corps. Major General "Uncle" John Sedgwick commanded the 6th Corps; James B. Ricketts commanded the 3rd Division; and Brigadier General William H. Morris commanded the 1st Brigade.¹³

The history of the 87th followed the history of the Army of the Potomac for the remainder of the war. On March 10, 1864 General Ulysses S. Grant took command of the Army of the Potomac (as well as all the other armies of the United States).¹⁴ The spring campaign got underway with the Battle of the Wilderness, then Spotsylvania Courthouse, then Cold Harbor, with Grant trying to flank Lee and Lee always countering Grant's move. No longer, however, did the Union army fail to exploit its advantage as had previously been the case. Grant always turned south, invariably with successful results. His men were as good as or better than the Confederates, but the Army of the Potomac's commanding general was never able to realize it. Grant wired Lincoln that he intended to fight it out on this line if it took all summer.¹⁵ Lincoln had indeed finally found a general who would fight. The news media and the Washington establishment, however, stridently objected to Grant. They said he was, among other things a drunk, which occasioned Lincoln's famous rejoinder that they should find out what he drank so he could buy the same for all his generals.

The 87th sustained no serious losses in the Wilderness and Spotsylvania Courthouse battles. At Cold Harbor, June 1, 1864, however, it was ordered to cross the Confederate works. The order was gallantly executed, with the works carried and held. The valor displayed called forth a congratulatory order from General Meade. The regiment's loss in killed and wounded was about one third of its strength.¹⁶

As the Battle of Cold Harbor drew to a close, the 87th withdrew with the 6th Corps when Grant ordered another of his flanking movements to get between Lee and Richmond. The constant pressure on Lee finally had the desired effect, and Lee retired to Petersburg, where the long siege began.¹⁷

The next few months took the regiment to the Weldon Railroad, which it tore up and where it repulsed an enemy attack. The purpose of this movement was to break Lee's supply line. It then moved from City Point to Baltimore to fight General Jubal Early, whose objective was to threaten Washington in an attempt to relieve the siege of Petersburg/Richmond.¹⁸

Early's troops outnumbered the Union forces about 8 to 3 at Monocacy, covering the Baltimore Pike on the high road to Washington. The men fought for five hours, beating back the first and second lines of attack and were then ordered to retire. Although the 87th left 300 of the enemy dead or wounded, it had itself suffered greater losses than in any other battle during its entire term of service. And though the Union forces lost the Battle of Monocacy, Early's force lost momentum, and the siege of Petersburg/Richmond continued.¹⁹

For two months the regiment performed toilsome marches with the Corps through Maryland and Virginia. On September 19 it moved with Philip Sheridan against the enemy at Opequon. The fighting was brutal, with the 87th losing 60 killed and wounded. The advantage was followed up on September 22nd at Fisher Hill. Early was routed again.²⁰

On September 23rd the original term of service expired, and the 87th Regiment was ordered to York, where on October 13, 1864, it was mustered out of service. David and William had come home.²¹

That might be the end of the notable events relating to the Culp family in the Civil War, but there remained the problem of locating Wesley Culp's body. The officer who had secured the pass for Wesley to visit his sisters delivered the sad news of Wesley's death and also told the family under which very distinctive tree Wesley's body could be found—it also stands to reason that the stock of his rifle, which was carved with his name, would have been used to mark the spot. The sisters claimed they never found Wesley: no one else ever found him either. All that is known is that the stock of his rifle was discovered and that within the farm house certain unexplained, loud, running footsteps are from time to time heard. Perhaps, the girls did find Wesley, as some people claim, and perhaps he is still "trying to deliver" Jack Skelly's "lover's message."²²

David lived out his life, suffering the ill-effects of the war, the fighting, and his imprisonment in Libby Prison. He died January 30, 1890, three months short of his 60th birthday.²³

Notes

1. Various archival files at the Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg, Pa.
2. J. H. Stine, *History of the Army of the Potomac* (Washington, 1903), p. 453; and James Stuart Montgomery, *The Shaping of a Battle: Gettysburg* (Philadelphia & New York, 1959), p. 50.
3. William A. Frassanito, *Early Photography at Gettysburg* (Gettysburg, 1995), pp. 124-128, and Cindy L. Small, *The Jennie Wade Story* (Gettysburg, 1991), pp. 13-15.
4. Samuel B. Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers 1861-5*, 5 vols. (Harrisburg, 1869-71), 5: *87th Regiment*, 28-9.
5. Brandon H. Beck and Charles Grunder, *Three Battles of Winchester* (Berryville, Virginia, 1988), p. vii.
6. Bates, 5:30.
7. Small, p. 16.
8. Bates, 5:29-31, and Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg—Culp's Hill and Cemetery Hill* (Chapel Hill, N.C. & London, 1993), pp. 328-9. Wesley probably spent 2 July on Brinkerhoff's Ridge with his regiment. Sometime after his arrival and before the morning of 3 July, he managed to visit his sister Julia. At about 2:00 am on 3 July, the 2d Virginia and the Stonewall Brigade left Brinkerhoff's Ridge and crossed to the west bank of Rock Creek, where they joined Johnson's division on the slope of Culp's Hill. This information came in part from Jesse Meyers (Myers), a niece of Wesley Culp, during an interview conducted on 30 August 1961. See Memorandum for the File, Wesley Culp, GNMP; *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, 9 November 1913, untitled article on J. Wesley Culp; Henry Lloyd Douglas, *I Rode with Stonewall* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1940), p. 251.
9. Military and Pension File of David Culp, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, and Bates, 5:31.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. General Horace Porter, *Campaigning With Grant* (New York, 1992), p. 22.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
16. Bates, 5:31.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. To my mind, the clue that Wesley was found is that the stock of his rifle was located and survives to this day. When the soldiers on either side (Union or Confederate) had time, they buried their comrades, usually under a tree, beside a rock, etc. They would then carve his name on the tree or rock or on a slat from one of the thousands of wooden boxes used to transport ammunition, food, clothing, etc., using the slat to mark the grave. Wesley's gun, with all necessary identification was already carved and ready. He was killed instantly on the skirmish line by a bullet to his forehead, so the gun was right there. All that was needed was to break off the stock and ram it in the ground.

Wesley's commanding officer sent his orderly to Anne and Julia to notify them that Wes had been killed and where to find him under a very distinctive tree. It is easier to defend the fact that he was found than that he was not found. Julia was his favorite sister. They were what I would call "soulmate siblings." Julia went numerous times to Shepherdstown and Martinsburg to see him (because of her visits, she was well known to Wesley's company comrades.). Wesley wrote letters which left no doubt of his affection for his "dear sister."

Simply giving Wesley a "normal" public burial would have been a problem. His brother is alleged to have said that Wes "had disgraced the family," was a traitor and rebel and deserved "to be shot on sight." Others in the town felt the same. Thus,

having the body was one thing and finding a burial place for him was another. In retreating, the Confederates had abandoned the land between Wesley's temporary grave and the town, site of the sisters' relatives' farm. They would not bury him on the farmland because it was littered with temporary graves which would be dug up in the months and years to come for permanent reburial. The obvious choice, then, would have been the farm house cellar or a similar place.

It is scarcely possible to read a book about Gettysburg and the Civil War without some reference to this story. Two recent, interesting accounts may be found in: Frassanito, pp. 24-6; and Small, pp. 14-16, 29-31, and 69.

23. David Culp's obituary (*Star and Sentinel*, 4 Feb. 1890, Culp family file at Adams County Historical Society) reads: "David Culp, plaster, died on Friday last, at the residence of his sister Mrs. J. J. Tawney. Mr. Culp had been in bad health for more than a year, and had spent a portion of the last year at the Soldier's Home, Erie, Pa. He served throughout the war as a member of Co. F, 87th Pa. Reg., and had a most excellent army record. He was buried on Sunday afternoon with the honors of war, Corporal Skelly Post and the Sons of Veterans, accompanied by the G. A. R. Band attending the funeral. John Sheads, Chas. Armor, George Holtzworth and Perry J. Tawney, all members of his company acted as pall-bearers."