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The Battery K, 1st Ohio Light Artillery Monument

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The Battery K, 1st Ohio Light Artillery Monument

Description

At the corner of Carlisle and Lincoln Streets there is an original 12-pounder Napoleon that stands guard over a granite monument. The monument is just one of the monuments to numerous artillery batteries that fought at the battle of Gettysburg. So what makes this monument so unique that warrants a paper written on it? According to the monument this battery, "engaged the enemy with great gallantry." Thus their deeds at Gettysburg should not go unnoticed. Also the monument lies on the campus of Gettysburg College, and many college students are unaware of the events that went on upon this campus on the day of July 1-3, 1863. This monument is not just some small monuments that you see on the battlefield; this is a large and impressive monument. But what about this monument, a monument to Battery K of the 1st Ohio Light Artillery, what is their story, and how did they get to be on a spot in the northern corner of our campus. Why did these men from Ohio end up all the way in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania? The story of Battery K at Gettysburg is a story that is very intense one although the regiment only fought here for half an hour. [*excerpt*]

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Hidden in Plain Sight is a collection of student papers on objects that are "hidden in plain sight" around the Gettysburg College campus. Topics range from the Glatfelter Hall gargoyles to the statue of Eisenhower and from historical markers to athletic accomplishments. You can download the paper in pdf format and click "View Photo" to see the image in greater detail.

Keywords

Gettysburg College, Hidden in Plain Sight, Battle of Gettysburg, Battery K, 1st Ohio Light Artillery, 12-pound Napoleon

Disciplines

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Hidden in Plain Sight:
The Battery K, 1st Ohio Light Artillery Monument

History 300

Historical Methods

Dr. Michael Birkner

By

David Naples

Fall 2005

At the corner of Carlisle and Lincoln Streets there is an original 12-pounder Napoleon that stands guard over a granite monument. The monument is just one of the monuments to numerous artillery batteries that fought at the battle of Gettysburg. So what makes this monument so unique that warrants a paper written on it? According to the monument this battery, “engaged the enemy with great gallantry.” Thus their deeds at Gettysburg should not go unnoticed. Also the monument lies on the campus of Gettysburg College, and many college students are unaware of the events that went on upon this campus on the day of July 1-3, 1863. This monument is not just some small monuments that you see on the battlefield; this is a large and impressive monument. But what about this monument, a monument to Battery K of the 1st Ohio Light Artillery, what is their story, and how did they get to be on a spot in the northern corner of our campus. Why did these men from Ohio end up all the way in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania? The story of Battery K at Gettysburg is a story that is very intense one although the regiment only fought here for half an hour.¹

We should start at the beginning of the regiment back in 1861. The Confederate forces had fired on Fort Sumter that April, and the United States government was assembling an army to fight the secession. The 1st Ohio Light Artillery was formed before the war in 1860 under Ohio’s militia laws. It had twelve batteries that were called up for three months of service. On October 22, 1861 the Battery K of the 1st Ohio Light Artillery were mustered into Federal service serving for three years.² The Colonel commanding the 1st Ohio was Col. James Barnett. The Captain of the battery until 1863 was Captain Wm. L. Debeck. The 1st Ohio left the state

¹ Gregory Coco, [A Concise Guide to the Artillery at Gettysburg](#) (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1998), 18.

² Larry Stevens, “1st Ohio Light Artillery, Battery K”, <http://www.ohiocivilwar.com/1lak.html>. 1.

in February of 1862 when it marched to West Virginia. From there the 1st OVLA participated in the ill-fated Shenandoah Campaign of 1862.³

Battery K consisted of four bronze 12 pound Napoleons. These 12 pound guns was designated the 1857 because that was the year that it official started mass production in the Federal arsenals. The 1857 was the mainstay of the Federal artillery regiments during the war. The Napoleon got its name because it was first introduced by Napoleon III of France.⁴ These were bronze cannon, which made them a very reliable weapon. Bronze gave the cannon the ability to stretch when the powder charge was set off, thus the barrel was not prone to bursting. The problem with the Napoleon was that it was a smoothbore, and because of this did not have the aim or the range of its rifled counterparts. Also it was more expensive to produce. Despite these problems the gun was still widely used because of its ability to fire multiple kinds of shot, such as round shot, grape, and canister, which the men of Battery K put to good use.⁵

Battery K was part of the Artillery regiment of the 11th Corps of the Army of the Potomac in 1863. They were commanded by Captain Lewis Heckman, and they had been through the Chancellorsville Campaign, and were now following Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia up into Pennsylvania. On June 29th they arrived in Emmitsburg, but they would not stay long.⁶ On June 30th just two days before the battle the battery had a strength of 118 men.⁷

On July 1st General John Buford's Cavalry division was in the town of Gettysburg. General Robert E. Lee sent Major General Harry Heth and Major General William Pender

³ Ibid.

⁴ Philip M. Cole, Civil War Artillery at Gettysburg, (Da Capo Press, 2002), 87.

⁵ Cole, Civil War Artillery, 88.

⁶ Roland Lowery, The Story of Battery I First Regiment Ohio Volunteer Light Artillery, 1861-1865, (1971), 28.

⁷ John W. Busey and David G. Martin, Regimental Strengths at Gettysburg (Baltimore: Gateway Press, Inc. 1982), 87

divisions to Gettysburg to assess the Federal strength, thus started one of the bloodiest battle on American soil.⁸

Meanwhile while Buford's cavalry and Reynolds's First Corps were engaged the Eleventh Corps was making its way to Gettysburg. The Eleventh Corps would make it to Gettysburg at about 10am. The infantry and two artillery batteries, Dilger's and Wheeler's were sent forward to hook up with the First Corps and defend the Northern part of town. Battery K stayed in reserve on Cemetery Hill. The Eleventh Corps was commanded by General Shurz, who replaced Howard after Howard takes over the First Corps from the slain Reynolds, who commanded the corps to cover the right flank of the First Corps and extend the Federal line eastward. As soon as the Eleventh Corps get into position the Confederate division of General Ewell appeared on Oak Hill in front of the Eleventh Corps. On this hill Richard S. Ewell places his artillery and they rained down iron on the infantry of the Eleventh Corps. Captain Hubert Dilger of Battery I of the 1st Ohio Light Artillery was brought up to support the infantry.⁹ The Confederate gunners on Oak Hill spotted Dilger's first two guns and opened up on them. Dilger brought up his other four Napoleons and they start to slow the Confederates rate of fire, until that is that Ewell's gunners start to bring up rifled cannons that can easily pick off the shiny bronze Napoleons. Dilger is in desperate need of support.¹⁰

Support came from the 13th Battery of the New York Light Artillery under Captain William Wheeler. Wheeler's battery was called off of Cemetery Hill and made its way through Gettysburg. Unfortunately the roads through Gettysburg were so bad that Wheeler lost two of

⁸ "The Gettysburg Campaign", <http://www.civilwarhome.com/gettyscampaign.htm>, 1.

⁹ L. Van Loan Naisawald, Grape and Canister: The Story of the Field Artillery of the Army of the Potomac, 1861-1865 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 355.

¹⁰ Van Loan Naisawald, Grape and Canister, 356.

his caissons on the way to Dilger's aid.¹¹ Wheeler's four guns joined Dilger's under the latter's command. The combined ten guns from these two batteries started to slow the Confederate fire from Oak Hill. Dilger decides to move his battery 400 yards closer to Oak Hill under the cover from Wheeler's battery.¹² As Dilger moves forward Confederate infantry from General Early's division swept over Oak Hill and give the, "rebels the advantage of the day" according to Van Loan Naisawald. Wheeler and Dilger start to take numerous casualties and start to fall back.¹³

Although all of this may seem unimportant, it plays into why Battery K was where it was, and what it would face. Now it was time for Heckman's battery to participate in the battle. The battery was called off Cemetery ridge and was, "not ordered in until the corps had begun to fall back. He was then put into position, with a view of holding the enemy in check until the corps had time to retire through the town to [Cemetery] hill beyond," according to Major Osborn who was the Eleventh Corps Chief of Artillery.¹⁴ The battery was put into place on the, "north fringe of town near Gettysburg College."¹⁵ In modern day the battery took up a position in the vicinity of where Huber Hall stands. A person now looking at this spot would have difficulty trying to see more than a hundred men, 48 horses, and four cannon on this spot, but they were there. From this position they were able to shell the Confederate infantry while the rest of the Eleventh Corps fell back behind them. Battery K was broken into two sections of two cannons each. Second Lieutenant Charles M. Schiely commanded the right section, while Second Lieutenant Columbus Rodamour commanded the left.¹⁶ The men of Battery K set to work firing everything they had at the oncoming Confederates. In front of them Dilger and Wheeler's

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Van Loan Naisawald, Grape and Canister, 357.

¹³ Van Loan Naisawald, Grape and Canister, 358

¹⁴ Richard A. Baumgartner, Buckeye Blood Ohio at Gettysburg (Huntington, WV: Blue Acorn Press, 2003), 61.

¹⁵ Van Loan Naisawald, Grape and Canister, 359.

¹⁶ Baumgartner, Buckeye Blood, 61.

batteries were retreating using a leapfrog tactic that was rarely used during the Civil War. The batteries pulled back while the Confederate infantry crept closer and closer toward town.¹⁷

Battery K fired furiously at the incoming Confederates. According to Battery K's Quartermaster Sergeant Cecil C. Reed, "We commenced giving them our best wishes in the shape of shell and canister, which mowed them down like wheat." As the Eleventh Corps had passed them, the battery had just rebel infantry in front of them, General Hay's Louisiana Brigade, nicknamed the Louisiana Tigers, and closed on the guns in a five regiment front.¹⁸ The men of Battery K were firing shot after shot of mostly canister at the charging Confederates but still they came. Hay's brigade came closer and closer and the men were, "hard pressed to hold their ground." Suddenly the "gray skirmishers" closed in on both the front and the flanks of Heckman's battery. The Confederate troops would charge the battery during firings while the artillerymen scrambled to reload the four Napoleons as quickly as they could.¹⁹ The gray wave was too much for the Ohioans, and the battery became a mixture of blue and gray. Heckman scrambled to get his men out of this situation as quickly as he could. While the artillerymen were fighting off the bayonets of Hay's men, Heckman was only able to get Rodamour's two guns out of the fight safely, and two Napoleons became Confederate trophies.

The men of Battery K had fought for about thirty minutes and had expelled 113 rounds most of them canister. With this rate of fire the men were firing just fewer than four rounds a minute. The Battery made its way back up to Cemetery Hill, where the battery was seen as a, "questionable combat reliability" and was sent to the rear of the army and would not participate again in the battle.²⁰ Major Osburn complimented the battery on there action. The butcher's bill

¹⁷ Van Loan Naisawald, Grape and Canister, 359.

¹⁸ Baumgartner, Buckeye Blood, 61.

¹⁹ Fairfax Downey, The Guns at Gettysburg (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1958), 49.

²⁰ Van Loan Naisawald, Grape and Canister, 360.

for the fight was two men killed, Private Lewis Opert and Private Charles Zeische.²¹ One officer was wounded as well as ten men wounded, two men missing, and nine horses killed.²² The price had been high for Battery K which had made it possible for the Eleventh Corps to get through town safely. Thus ends the involvement of Battery K, 1st Ohio Light Artillery Regiment at Gettysburg. The battery would be re-mustered in February of 1864 and mustered out on July 12, 1865.

Twenty-four years later the men of Battery K along with other Ohio veterans were joined with citizens of Ohio to dedicate the Ohio monuments in Gettysburg. The joyous day was September 14, 1887. The government of Ohio had formed memorial committees to oversee the placement and erection of Ohio's monuments. Some of the Ohio units had multiple people to oversee them, but Heckman's battery's monument had one, the battery's first Captain, Capt. Wm. L. Debeck from Cincinnati.²³ The dedication ceremony had quite a large number of activities for the veterans and others to participate in. It first began with a "National Salute" which was fired at sunrise on Cemetery Hill. The dedication of the monuments was to start "promptly at 10am", this was followed by a "Dedicatory Salute" which nineteen guns were fired, one for each Ohio unit that fought at the battle. There were "Regimental Reunions" at 2pm, and "Ohio Camp Fires" at 7:30 that night.²⁴ The song of the festivities was the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and the dedication concluded with a benediction by Rev. William E. Moore D.D. In a pamphlet about the dedication ceremony there is a list of the units that fought at the battle and on page nine there they are under the Eleventh Army Corps, "Battery K, 1st Ohio Light

²¹ Baumgartner, *Buckeye Blood*, 62.

²² Coco, *A Concise Guide*, 18.

²³ Dedication of the Ohio Memorials on the Battlefield at Gettysburg, PA, Wednesday, Sept. 14, '87 (Columbus, OH: Nitschke Press, 1887), 14.

²⁴ Dedication of Ohio Memorials, 6.

Artillery, Capt. Lewis Heckman.”²⁵ Also interesting to note is that also they list where every monument is located in Gettysburg, and Battery K’s monument is listed as, “Corner Carlisle and Lincoln Streets, Pennsylvania College Grounds.” From this one passage alone we can see how the Battery is tied to the College.

Not a lot is written about the battery at the 50th or 75th reunions of the battle. At the 50th reunion in 1913 Private William H. Cobbledick claimed that he was the oldest Ohio veteran in attendance at the ripe old age of 90.²⁶ After the veterans were all gone and the mystic of battle was now only for those weekend warriors that make it to Gettysburg, the Battery K monument had shrank back to its little corner on the Gettysburg College Campus.

If you ask a Gettysburg College Student, he or she probably does not have any idea what that monument is by Huber Hall. The monument sits there on that corner, guarding the spot where men once fought. Over the years not much has been done to that area except for the addition of a low stone wall in front of it. This monument was the first object that I saw as I came up to Gettysburg College. It amazed me how a great battle such as this could be tied so closely to my school. Of course many people know that Pennsylvania Hall served as both a Confederate and Federal hospital during the war, but how many people know about Battery K of the 1st Ohio Light Artillery, not many. It is sad to see in pictures of the campus taken through many periods in the schools history the monument is left out, often times the pictures cuts right in front of it so as just to include Huber Hall. I believe that what these brave men did here on July 1, 1863 should be known to all that attend this school. This monument is definitely an object that has been hidden in plain sight, waiting for someone to come along and unlock the history of what the men of Battery K went through.

²⁵ Dedication of Ohio Memorials, 7-9.

²⁶ Baumgartner, Buckeye Blood, 62.

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