



4-4-2014

## Folly at Fredericksburg: A Wound to the Pride of the 127th PA

Kevin P. Lavery  
*Gettysburg College*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/compiler>



Part of the [Military History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

**Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.**

---

Lavery, Kevin P., "Folly at Fredericksburg: A Wound to the Pride of the 127th PA" (2014). *The Gettysburg Compiler: On the Front Lines of History*. 42.

<https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/compiler/42>

This is the author's version of the work. This publication appears in Gettysburg College's institutional repository by permission of the copyright owner for personal use, not for redistribution. Cupola permanent link: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/compiler/42>

This open access blog post is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact [cupola@gettysburg.edu](mailto:cupola@gettysburg.edu).

---

# Folly at Fredericksburg: A Wound to the Pride of the 127th PA

## **Abstract**

After three months in Washington, the Dauphin County Regiment was at last headed south. Resentment in the ranks at the last-minute transfer had been replaced by enthusiasm for the coming battle. At last, the men were to see the fight they had enlisted to join. [*excerpt*]

## **Keywords**

The Gettysburg Compiler, Civil War, 150th Anniversary, Gettysburg, Civil War Memory, Sesquicentennial, 127th Pennsylvania Volunteers, Fredericksburg

## **Disciplines**

History | Military History | United States History

## **Comments**

This blog post originally appeared in [The Gettysburg Compiler](#) and was created by students at Gettysburg College.

# THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

## ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

---

### Folly at Fredericksburg: A Wound to the Pride of the 127th PA

April 4, 2014

By: Kevin Lavery, '16

*War games and drilling, though essential to military training, are no substitute for the real thing. They have their place: soldiers must be able to react automatically in the most straightforward of circumstances so that they can focus their energies on the less-predictable aspects of battle when the stakes become real. As the Dauphin County Regiment dove into its first battle, fresh from guard duty, the men had no idea of what they would face on the slopes of Maryes' Heights. The regiment showed courage and valor, but ultimately lacked discipline in the face of fire.*

After three months in Washington, the Dauphin County Regiment was at last headed south. Resentment in the ranks at the last-minute transfer had been replaced by enthusiasm for the coming battle. At last, the men were to see the fight they had enlisted to join.

As the regiment marched across the Rappahannock River, General Oliver Howard chided the men who ducked away from shells, which were “not half as dangerous as they seem[ed].” Perhaps not, but they were certainly dangerous enough to make Captain William Fox – a disinclined Confederate draftee who had deserted in favor of the Union – the regiment’s first casualty of battle. A shell landed directly beneath Jennings’ horse, but fortuitously it was a dud. Minutes later, when Howard himself was caught flinching away from an incoming shell, an anonymous member of the regiment smugly reminded him of his own advice. Humbled, Howard admitted that “dodging appears to be natural.”

Quickly, the experience began to tax the endurance and discipline of the men. Though they believed themselves to be one of the best drilled regiments in the army – they had, after all, had plenty of time to practice in Washington – most of the men had not yet experienced battlefield conditions and knew nothing of the noise, smoke, and fire that made mockery of the best plans and drills.

Once into the town, the regiment assaulted Marye’s Heights with Owen’s Brigade, to which the 127th had temporarily been assigned. When the brigade was finally forced to halt the advance amidst a hailstorm of death, the regiments took cover wherever they could find it. As the next

wave charged past before devolving into a chaotic retreat, the 127th, frightened and confused by the chaos, began a partial and haphazard retreat that had to be stopped by the officers.

Days later, as the Army of the Potomac still strove to maintain its untenable position; Captain Greenawalt pulled his men away from their assigned post. He approached General Howard directly and insisted that there was no way to hold the company's designated position without his men being butchered. Howard's response went unrecorded.

In the regiment's official history, the authors openly admit – but work hard to justify – such disasters of command. Major Jeremiah Rohrer records in his diary that the commanding generals excused the unordered retreat on the grounds that the regiment had performed well until the next wave came crashing back through their line. Greenawalt's insubordination, meanwhile, is treated as a noble act of heroic initiative that saved otherwise doomed lives. His decision, however justifiable in terms of saving lives, was nonetheless an act of disobedience, very dangerous on the battlefield. These amateur mistakes of command were not fatal, but they could have been.

Over a quarter of the regiment was wounded or killed during the course of the battle. It cannot be said that the regiment did not pay its share of the blood price. Certainly, the failings of the 127th did not alone determine the outcome of the battle, but they reflected wider failings across an army of civilian recruits unable to understand the rigors of combat until they themselves had experienced it. If only enthusiasm and pride alone counted toward victory, perhaps the regiment would have left a more widely renowned legacy. But alas, performance in battle matters in war.

Stay tuned for future posts about the 127th Pennsylvania . . .

Sources:

History of the 127th Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers: Familiarly Known as the "Dauphin County Regiment." Lebanon, PA: Report Publishing Company, 1902.

"127 Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers." PA-Roots. <http://www.pa-roots.com/pacw/infantry/127th/127thorg.html> (accessed March 14, 2014).

Image:

Captain Lorenzo L. Greenawalt, Page 61 of History of the 127th Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers.

