O'er Silent Fields

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Abstract
Followers of the Compiler may remember a piece I wrote in the early autumn of 2013 on the last stand of the 16th Maine Regiment of Volunteer Infantry on the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg. As I am living in Gettysburg this summer while I work as a Brian C. Pohanka intern in Gettysburg College's Special Collections, I of course could not miss the chance to hike up to the location of that stand on Oak Ridge to pay tribute to those boys from Maine. [excerpt]

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by Bryan Caswell, ’15

Followers of the Compiler may remember a piece I wrote in the early autumn of 2013 on the last stand of the 16th Maine Regiment of Volunteer Infantry on the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg. As I am living in Gettysburg this summer while I work as a Brian C. Pohanka intern in Gettysburg College’s Special Collections, I of course could not miss the chance to hike up to the location of that stand on Oak Ridge to pay tribute to those boys from Maine.

As I crested the ridge just north of town, I was struck by the historical dissonance of the panorama in front of me. So much has occurred in 151 years. Ribbons of tar and asphalt stretch across the gently sloping hills; great mechanical beasts wind their way around mute stone sentinels; the chatter of children lurks ever in the background.

Yet as I stood on Oak Ridge and looked out over those fields in front of me, all these distractions faded away, one by one, into the deepest recesses of my consciousness. Gone were the sounds of the cars and the voices of tourists. I was left with the gentle rustling of the wind and the soft chirping of birds. Soon, even these disappeared, and I was left with perhaps the greatest historical dissonance of all: silence.

Only silence, where 151 years ago two titans struggled mightily over the Pennsylvania farmland; where the roar of musketry and the deafening thunder of cannon rent the very air with death and destruction; where Rebel yells and Union “huzzahs” mingled with curses and moans.

Only silence, where a desperate General William Robertson had ordered 275 men from Maine to “hold at all costs;” where Colonel Charles Tilden turned to his men, telling them simply, “You know what that means.” Only silence, where those 275 men quietly and resolutely followed their orders.

Only silence.

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