5-30-2011

"...never forget what they did here": Memorial Day 2011

John M. Rudy
Gettysburg College

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Abstract
One of my pleasures on this holiday is to buy and place a flag on the monument to the 14th U.S. Regulars in the valley of death. Along the banks of Plum Run, the Regulars held back an onslaught from a pell-mell group of charging Confederates in what would be the final phase of the fight in the Wheatfield and Devil's Den area on July 2nd, 1863. As they retreated back across the swampy lowlands, Confederates hot on their heels, their own gunners on the slopes of the hill had no choice but to fire into the mangled mess of friend and enemy. Canister whizzed through the blue and butternut uniforms alike. [excerpt]

Keywords
CW150, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Civil War Era Studies, Civil War Interpretation, 14th US Regulars, Memorial Day

Disciplines
Cultural History | History | Military History | Public History | Social History | United States History

Comments
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"...never forget what they did here": Memorial Day 2011

As I get ready to head out into town today, for a big parade and the typical festivities here in Gettysburg, I wanted to make sure we put up something special for Memorial Day here.

One of my pleasures on this holiday is to buy and place a flag on the monument to the 14th U.S. Regulars in the valley of death. Along the banks of Plum Run, the Regulars held back an onslaught from a pell-mell group of charging Confederates in what would be the final phase of the fight in the Wheatfield and Devil's Den area on July 2nd, 1863. As they retreated back across the swampy lowlands, Confederates hot on their heels, their own gunners on the slopes of the hill had no choice but to fire into the mangled mess of friend and enemy. Canister whizzed through the blue and butternut uniforms alike.

At the end of the day, my Great-Great-Grand Uncle lay dead in that field. William Henry Francis, killed at Gettysburg. We have no photo of him. He has no marked grave in the cemetery. He has no marked grave at home. He most likely sleeps beneath the sod in plum run valley where he fell. That's the only tangible place I have that can connect me to him.

So today I'll be heading down to place a flag there to honor him. He was an average soldier. He had his doubts. Nonetheless, he died that they might be free. He died that we might be free. He died that we might be free.

I'd like to share his words with you today, as he wrote them. This is a letter he wrote home in November of 1862, as the army was changing and the war seemed so uncertain to the men in the field:
Camp near Warrington Nov 12th /62
Dear Father
Your letter received to day
and glad to hear your were all
well. but sorry to hear of cousin
death. I feel very well at
present. I presume you see
by the head of this that
we have changed positions
since I last wrote.
we started from Sharpsburg
the 29th and came here via
Harpers Ferry Snickers Gap
and White plains arived
here on the 9th where our next
trip is for I do not know
I hope it is for Washington
our leader is gone you cannot
imagine the disappointment
of the men by the loss of Mc Clene
--------
all of their trust was placed in
him they would follow
him through worse than fire
and water. yes through the
regions of lower blacknes.
most of the small Officers
in the 5th group, (ours) are
resigning. what it will
amount to I do not know.
I am afraid I shall be tempted
to shoot Baxter when I get
home. with Martha Rixon I
think she done well. Emma
Gray I think is an equal
mateh, as reopets your neighbors
I must say you have a splendid
set I wish I was there.
what ails old Stanton he must
be in a bad way.
By the way did you ever hear
whether Aunt Pulia got
that money three or four months
ago I sent you some I never
-------
heard from I will send
more and if that does not go I will stop sending enny more I have no more to write as I think of now hoping you will write soon I remain you son W H Francis

PS I received a letter from John the same day I got yours I have seen the 157th NYSV Kenyon Gleason and the boys are well I believe they think Soldiering is rough.== send us a paper occasionly I dont care what it is.

yours
H F