

right and a second to the left, with orders to advance “in concert” with the dismounted skirmish line. The remainder of the 11th was posted in the center and right center, “with orders to charge mounted on the appearance of wavering or confusion among the enemy.” Horse soldiers of the 5th Pennsylvania were posted west of the Jerusalem Plank Road, with instructions to storm Batteries No. 28 and 29. As the troopers were being formed, their right was shelled by a Confederate gun. To counter this fire, cannoneers of the 5th Pennsylvania unlimbered their mountain howitzers and hammered away at the lunette sheltering the Rebel cannon. Two squadrons of the 1st District of Columbia were dismounted and reinforced the carbineers on the skirmish line.⁴⁰

A courier had reached General Colston’s Battery No. 16 command post about noon with a note from General Wise, stating that the Yankees were advancing via the Jerusalem Plank Road and were threatening Major Archer’s position. Reinforcements were known to be on the way, but it would be some time before they arrived. Colston determined to ride to the point of danger. As he mounted his horse, the general called for his aide, Lt. J. T. Tosh, whom he placed in charge of Battery No. 16, with orders “not to leave that position until relieved.”

Colston galloped toward the Jerusalem Plank Road, and when halfway there he heard the rattle of small-arms. As he passed the area where two of Sturdivant’s 12-pounder howitzers were parked, the general hailed the sergeant in charge and told him to bring one of his pieces to Battery No. 28. Colston did not wait for the artillerists but hurried on. As he approached Battery No. 27, he sighted Union cavalry advancing up the Plank Road. Reaching Batteries No. 27 and 28, Colston found that Major Archer “had disposed his small force very judiciously”. A wagon had been overturned across the road, and together with a hastily built rail fence, formed a satisfactory barricade.

At the time of Colston’s arrival, Archer’s Reserves had just repulsed the initial charge by the advance squadron of the 11th Pennsylvania Cavalry. Several dead horses, some sabers and carbines, and a couple of prisoners were trophies of that limited success, and the men’s spirits had soared. It was evident to Colston and Archer that the Federals were preparing another and more formidable attack. Their lines were visible in the edge of the woods behind Gregory’s house, and the Confederates’ slender ranks were extended to the right and left to present a front of equal length. The 12-pounder howitzer now came up, its arrival cheered by the Reserves. Colston placed the gun in Battery No. 28, taking his station at the same time in the rifle pits, which were not more than waist high.

⁴⁰ OR 36, pt. 2, 308, 311; Roper, Archibald, and Coles, *History of the Eleventh Pennsylvania Volunteer Cavalry*, 121.

The dismounted carbineers from the 11th Pennsylvania and the skirmishers of the 1st District of Columbia pressed forward, while a mounted line from the 5th Pennsylvania appeared behind Gregory's house. Colston called for the Reserves to hold their fire until the Yankees were "at close range, and this direction was well observed." The howitzer, however, bellowed, and the blue clad skirmishers retired, took cover, and blazed away. A number of Kautz' sharpshooters occupied Gregory's house and fired from the windows and garret, some shooting through openings made by knocking off shingles.

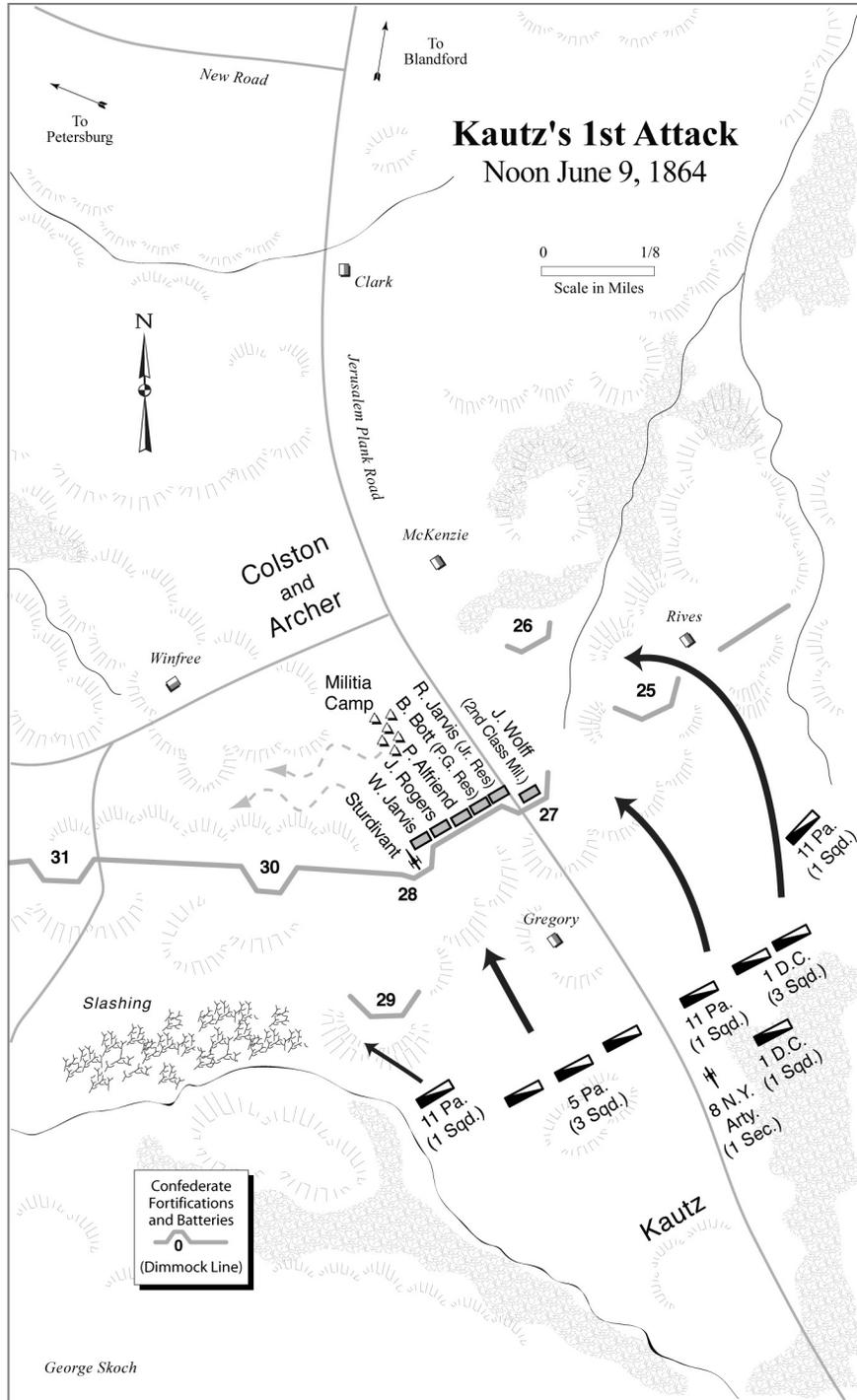
Colston told the sergeant of artillery to shell the house, but the distance was so short that the projectiles ripped through the building before exploding, and failed to set the structure on fire as the general had hoped. Seeing that the 5th Pennsylvania's line presented an inviting target, Colston shouted for the artillerists to shift target and give them canister. The general was shocked when the sergeant reported that there was no canister in the limber. Colston then ordered him to shell the mounted line, but too much elevation was used, and the projectiles overshot their mark and burst harmlessly beyond. Whereupon, Colston ordered the sergeant to "cut the fuse at the closest notch," and, pointing the piece very low, he had "the satisfaction of seeing the shell explode just in front of the 5th Pennsylvania and make a great gap in its ranks . . ."

All the while, the minies whistled uncomfortably thick and close. Holding their fire, the Confederates hugged the low breastworks. Union artillery now went into action, first the 12-pounder mountain howitzers of the 5th Pennsylvania and then Lt. Peter Morton's two 3-inch rifled guns, emplaced within 600 yards of Battery No. 28. Undaunted by this turn of events, brave civilians, with Major Archer at their head, volunteered to charge the guns. Colston knew that as soon as they left the cover of the trenches, the Virginia Reserves would be destroyed by the breech-loading carbines, so he shook his head. "Our only hope is in delay," he told the citizen-soldiers.

Colston called for a volunteer to find General Wise, and let him know that time was running out for Archer's Battalion. Eighteen-year-old Lt. Wales Hart of the Junior Reserves stepped forward. After receiving the message, Hart mounted Colston's horse and thundered off. Bullets kicked up dust around him and under his horse's hoofs.

Now the time the Confederates could hold the combat-ready Federals at bay was measured in minutes. But on these few minutes, Colston recalled, "hung the rescue or the capture" of Petersburg. If they were driven from Batteries No. 25-29 before reinforcements crossed the Appomattox, Kautz' horsemen would thunder into the city and burn the bridges. With Petersburg would be lost the railroads upon which General Lee was dependent for his supplies.

But the end was near. Covered by the fire of the artillery and the sharpshooters posted in Gregory's house, carbineers of the 11th Pennsylvania and skirmishers of



the 1st District of Columbia worked their way to within 50 yards of the earthworks. Kautz' mounted line now moved forward—the 11th Pennsylvania east of the Plank Road and the 5th Pennsylvania to the west. The horseman overlapped the Confederate position. General Colston called for the Reserves to fire. As they blazed away, a number fell dead or wounded. Before the survivors could reload, horsemen of the 11th Pennsylvania turned the Rebels left. Occupying Battery No. 26, which Archer had not had enough men to garrison, Union sharpshooters swept Battery No. 28's gorge with destructive volleys.

Troopers of the 5th Pennsylvania forged ahead. Seeing that obstructions made a mounted charge impossible, Lt. Col. Christopher Kleinz halted and dismounted his unit in a defiladed area. As soon as horse-holders had been detailed, Kleinz waved his men forward, and they secured ground close to the works. Immediately after the charge of the 11th Pennsylvania, Kleinz' troopers leapt to their feet and dashed forward. In a futile effort to beat back the blue clad wave, General Colston picked up and discharged several muskets dropped by "our fallen men". Now the Confederates were hemmed in on three sides, and "only a narrow path leading through an abrupt ravine offered a way of escape." As the cannoneers sought to limber up their howitzer, they were fired on by the 5th Pennsylvania—the horses were shot down in their traces, and two artillerists killed. The gun was captured. For as long as there were reunions, troopers of the 5th and 11th Pennsylvania, and the 1st District of Columbia argued as to which unit reached the howitzer first. Some of the Reserves were killed or wounded with bayonet or carbine butts, and many captured.

After they had secured the area, Union officers reported finding the bodies of 30 dead Rebels sprawled in the dust and 40 prisoners. The shattered remnants of Archer's Battalion made their way down and across the ravine and retired to Reservoir Hill, where they halted and reformed. After driving the Rebels from the lunettes, Kautz called a halt to recall his dismounted troopers and to send to the rear Confederate wounded and prisoners. "Boots and Saddles" soon sounded, and the mounted column rode out, taking the Jerusalem Plank Road. Several files were thrown forward as skirmishers. Many Federals were confident that they had broken the back of Confederate resistance and would enter Petersburg without further opposition.

The time purchased by Archer's Battalion at a fearful price gave the cannoneers of the Petersburg Artillery, commanded by Capt. Edward Graham, time to drive the teams pulling their four guns across the Appomattox Bridge. A boy's school was in session on Sycamore Street above Fillmore. The teacher had just dismissed his pupils, and the boys came trooping out into the street in time to hear the rumbling of gun carriages up the street. It was the Petersburg Artillery, coming up at a gallop. Excited women and children got in the way, and Captain Graham was "so irritated when he came near to running over one of his own lady