

From *The Wastage*

The reb skirmishers fell back. Any minute Taylor expected a regiment to rise in the woods and deliver a volley that would kill them all. Union guns were now on that field, firing at the hill. The cannons dueled each other like angry bears. Taylor lost track of time but the artillery fired on each other for an hour. One of the Union rounds found a rebel caisson and the explosion was huge, and set the men to cheering. Somewhere in all of that chaos, McCoy found new orders. He waited until everyone came up to the railroad fill, then sent them over the top, enmass, as if there was no sense waiting to catch their breath.

The rest of the division was coming hard through the bog behind them. Rebel cannon crashed and roared to their right but not on their front. Taylor slipped on a rail and went down, skinning his hand. At that moment a rebel volley from the hill blasted them and the air sang with bullets, shouts, screams and the frail call of an exhausted bugler. The whinngg and ssssspptt of bullets flew by, like fast bees. Sweat stung Taylor's eyes. Dead weeds filled the cut and the earth was soft. He pushed himself up and began to pant, croaked something that sounded like "Forward!" and stumbled down the other side of the railroad cut, running after D Company.

The wooded hill where the ammunition wagon had exploded was before them. Tired cheers came from the men as they struggled up the slope, their bayoneted Sharps rifles at right shoulder were pulled down and pointed forward, cold steel looking for flesh. Their noises reassured them they were alive. A hundred, then two hundred more Pennsylvanians fired ragged volleys into the trees toward the dirt mounds, dropping to one knee to reload, others surging passed, spinning suddenly, twisting back with blood surging from necks or heads or chests, red on blue!

“Chhhhaaaaaarge!”

The command came, and the officers took it up. “Charge!” Taylor screamed twice, three times. The Bucktails had been pushed back as skirmishers back into their regiment, and now their entire brigade, hurraed and rushed forward, off the railroad cut, down into the open field in front of the ridge. Taylor saved the rounds in the pistol but waived his sword. Something exploded to this side and the brisance hit Taylor broadside, knocking him down. He was covered by what had knocked him down. Taylor saw a human torso but no head, and grass covered in blood and entrails.

Taylor vomited, then pushed away what was left of one of his men, got to his feet and stumbled ahead, following his company toward the ridge.