

THE SHELLING OF CARLISLE 150TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION
July 1, 2013

Script

7:00 pm

Welcome, my name is Mark Scheneman. Many of you know me as Fr. Mark, Rector of St. John's Church on the Square. I am also the Vice President of Historic Carlisle and chair of this event. Thank you for coming out this evening as we commemorate what might well be considered the most dramatic, if not the most important moment in the long history of this historic community.

As we gather this evening, one united country and community, let us honor America and sing the National Anthem.

(The Carlisle Band plays the National Anthem- all standing)

Please be seated.

On behalf of Historic Carlisle, I welcome you and would like to recognize many leaders of the borough, the county and the state who are in attendance this evening. (Read names of each...) I would also like to thank the Carlisle Town Band for their music and participation. They are preparing to perform tomorrow evening in Gettysburg as well and we appreciate their willingness to be with us in Carlisle tonight.

We are also joined this evening by a number of military living historians, representing both the South and the North. By their presence and dedication they help this anniversary come alive for us all and serve as a tribute to those who served in the ranks 150 years ago.

Exactly 150 years ago, at this very hour, in this space, the artillery of Confederate General JEB Stuart, commanding the Cavalry Division of the Army of Northern Virginia, began shelling this town. We are here to remember and commemorate this event. And to do so, we will now tell the story, in word and in action.

Narrator 1

At this very hour, at just about 7:00 on the evening of July 1, 1863, several citizens, looking down E. High Street, which then was known as Market Street, saw in the distance a detachment of unknown cavalymen at the intersection of York and Trindle Springs Roads (where the Hess station is now located). This was only about 500 yards from where we are now standing. The horse soldiers had halted, and sitting in their saddles, were apparently shocked to see Union infantry forces here in the Square. It wasn't what they were expecting to find in Carlisle.

(Action: some Union forces “occupy” the center of the Square, visibly moving about... As the next narration begins, the Union troops quietly withdraw west, behind First Presbyterian Church)

To set the stage for what was about to take place, we need to go back several days. Rumors of the invasion of the Army of Northern Virginia, commanded by the celebrated Confederate General Robert E. Lee, had filled the area newspapers for weeks. The Southern forces had won dramatic victories at Fredericksburg in December and Chancellorsville in early May. Lee now hoped to force a conclusion to the war by invading the north. It was thought that his immediate objective was in fact the capital city of Pennsylvania, Harrisburg.

The United States War Department responded by hastily assembling a force of mostly Union reserve and untrained troops, commanded in Harrisburg by Union Major General Darius Couch and Brigadier General William Smith, second in command. Meanwhile, the main Union Army of the Potomac, still nursing its wounds and pride after a series of defeats, began to shadow Gen. Lee’s army as it crossed into Maryland and by the middle of June, into Pennsylvania.

The invasion of Pennsylvania came to Carlisle on Saturday, June 27 as lead units of Lt. Gen. Richard Ewell’s Corps arrived where we are standing. Advancing from Shippensburg, and flooding the Walnut Bottom Road, Ritner Highway, and Newville Pike, nearly 12,000 Southern troops converged on Carlisle. By 5:00 that afternoon, a Confederate band appeared, playing “Dixie”. A meager Union force retreated from the town and most residents took to their homes.

(Action: Confederate forces- move out from behind the Old Courthouse, and into the Square as the band plays a chorus of “Dixie”; then break ranks and mill about)

Narrator 2

One Alabama soldier later wrote, “This is a very handsome place, much more so than any town of like size in the South”. But another remarked, “The inhabitants appeared gloomy and dejected, and showed no disposition to converse with us.”

Soon, demands were made for provisions, critical for supplying such a huge army of men. Throughout the rest of the weekend, an uneasy and tense atmosphere formed a cloud over Carlisle. Gen. Ewell made his headquarters at Carlisle Barracks. The rest of the large Second Corps took over the town, the college, and every available space for the night.

The next day, Sunday July 28, many southern soldiers attended worship at four downtown churches which opened for services. However, that evening, after a grand review of troops at Carlisle Barracks, many of the southern troops discovered quantities of strong German beer which they confiscated. With nightfall Sunday evening, the army started to sleep it off, even as other Confederate units probed north towards Steretts Gap and east, occupying Mechanicsburg as well.

On Monday, June 29 Ewell's Corps prepared to march on Harrisburg. But new orders were received from General Lee.

At 6:00 am on Tuesday, June 30, Ewell's army suddenly began to march south, down S. Hanover Street, what was then called the Baltimore Pike, on their way to a rendezvous with history and the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg, Wednesday morning.

(Action- Confederate troops withdraw east down High Street)

Narrator 1

Carlisle had narrowly escaped the fate that was to befall Gettysburg. The Confederate army left mounds of trash and had confiscated many provisions, but no one was injured or property destroyed. People ventured out of their homes and started to clean up.

But not all of the southern forces had marched south. Elements of the Jenkins' Cavalry were yet to engage Union reserve forces guarding Harrisburg in what is called the Battle of Sporting Hill on Tuesday, June 30. That inconclusive engagement ended with the retreat of all Confederate forces, converging on Gettysburg, brought the first act of the drama to a conclusion.

Early on a hot Wednesday, July 1st, just as the Battle of Gettysburg was beginning 30 miles to the south, Union reserve troops, under that command of Brigadier General William Smith, began the 19 mile march to Carlisle. Smith is more commonly known by his popular nickname, "Baldy Smith", a name assigned to him for obvious reasons..... He commanded essentially militia units from Pennsylvania and New York. They were green troops, at best. And the march took them all day, in muggy summer weather, without enough water. When they straggled into Carlisle, a little after 4:00 in the afternoon, they were exhausted and hungry. But the good towns people of Carlisle greeted them as heroes, come to save the town and its honor! Soon, tables were set up here on the Square, and the bounty of food and drink which had been hidden from the Confederate army days before, suddenly materialized. A party atmosphere developed.

(Action: Union troops straggle in from N. Hanover Street to the Square. They are greeted by civilians. Tables are set up. Baskets and buckets appear. Everyone stays in the Square. A carriage with Gen. Baldy Smith arrives, from N. Hanover Street. The Gen gets out of the carriage.)

Gen. Baldy Smith arrived at 6:30, clad in a gray civilian walking suit, "looking like a country gentleman out to inspect his farm". He was driven in a carriage. He quickly ordered Union artillery units down the Baltimore Pike (S. Hanover Street) to the top of the distant hill. A second battery of Union cannon waited in the Square. By the time this was accomplished at 7:00, the mysterious Cavalry units were first spotted in the distance, east, where the Hess Station now stands.

(Action: Union soldier and civilians (a young person) point towards Confederate forces down E. High Street)

Narrator 2

The mysterious Cavalry down E. High Street were in fact the lead units of the main force of Confederate horse soldiers, commanded by the dashing and celebrated Gen. JEB Stuart. Back on June 22, Gen Robert E. Lee had detached his Cavalry Division to guard the mountain passes and screen the army on the east and it advanced towards Harrisburg. But the journey turned out to be a marathon, as Stuart captured a large Union wagon train, then fought skirmish battles at Westminster Maryland, and Hanover, Pennsylvania. By the morning of July 1 the column, led by Gen. Fitzhugh Lee, trudged through Dover, then in the afternoon, Dillsburg, before finally appearing on the eastern edge of Carlisle. Stuart assumed he would find Ewell's Corps still in Carlisle; instead he was staring at the Union reserve forces on the Square.

Gen. Stuart and his staff road with these lead troopers. Exhausted and with his units spread out for miles back the road to Dillsburg and beyond, he was in no mood for a fight. But he did decide to force the issue.

(Gen. Stuart rides up E. High Street, not quite to the Square, then turns around and rides back towards the area in front of the Old Prison)

Suddenly, a man ran into the Square from S. Hanover Street, shouting, "The Rebels are coming"!

(Action- civilian runs in front of the Old Courthouse shouting, "The Rebels are coming.....")

The exhausted Union troops paid little attention; nor did the townspeople who mingled among them. That is, until the retort of a cannon was heard and a shell burst high above them. The Shelling of Carlisle had commenced.

(Confederate cannon fire once from halfway down E. High Street)

Narrator 1

A Union soldier later described the scene: "The Square was crowded with ladies, soldiers, and citizens...when the sound of a cannon is heard and a shell comes howling over the town. At first not much attention is paid to it, but five or six others arriving in rapid succession, several of which burst overhead, convince the most confiding that the Rebels had again returned. There followed a scene of indescribable confusion, the soldiers running hither and thither to find their regiments, men, women, and children running about, each trying to find a place of safety." Most of the Union troops took cover behind buildings or in homes; civilians descended into cellars.

(Union forces and civilians on the Square scurry for cover and the Confederate cannon fire again)

Baldy Smith took charge and four Union cannon were quickly unlimbered from their horse drawn teams; two cannon placed over the railroad tracks in the center of the Square facing east and two in front of this location, facing south. The anxious Union artillery unit got off only two shots of their own towards the Confederate invaders, when the southern batteries lowered their aim and poured cannon fire into the Square itself. Corporal Stuart Patterson from a Philadelphia reserve artillery unit was directing the Union gun crew. Suddenly a well aimed Confederate

shell hit the Union cannon, disabling the piece. A shell fragment hit Corporal Patterson, knocking away his sabre and mangling his hand. The wounded man was carried into St. John's Church where a surgeon removed two fingers from his hand as he lay in the pews. Meanwhile the Confederate Shelling intensified and the Union cannons remained quiet.

(Union forces fire their cannon? Confederate cannon fire a third time. Union soldiers carry or assist wounded soldier into the front door of St. John's Church.)

Some Union units recovered from their shock and were deployed in a skirmish line along the west bank of the LeTort Creek. They were joined by civilian Carlisle home guards- shopkeepers, professors and even some clergy, who pulled old muskets and rifles off their mantle and prepared to defend the town from a full Confederate attack.

(Some civilians- The Home Guard- appear from behind 1st Presbyterian Church with muskets and rifles and run east, past the Square, pausing with Union troops to fire a volley of small arms towards the Confederate guns and then turning into Irwin Row and continuing around the back of St. John's Church)

Narrator 2

All of this happened in about an hour, from 7:00 to 8:00. Then the cannon fire ceased. In minutes two Confederates entered the town from E. High Street, an officer with a white handkerchief tied to his sabre and a bugler announcing their arrival. Stuart was demanding the unconditional surrender of the town. On arriving at the Square, they were met by Gen. Baldy Smith. It is said that with colorful language, the Union General retorted, "Shell away and be damned!" The southern couriers informed Smith he could have 30 minutes to remove civilians before his wish would be granted.

(JEB Stuart and aide, with a white flag, ride from E. High Street to the Square. Baldy Smith calmly walks up to JEB Stuart and jesters his 'response'. "Shell away and be damned!" Gen. Stuart turns his horse and rides back down E. High Street)

This scene would be replayed twice more- the final demand for surrender at about 11:00. Each demand was rejected by Gen Badly Smith. And so the Shelling continued. And estimated maximum of 140 cannon shells were fired towards the center of Carlisle in the course of 7 and ½ hours. Apparently, for fear of using up their ammunition, the southerners slackened their rate of fire.

Even still, many of the solid shot and the canister with smaller balls, found their targets. Most of the public buildings, including the Courthouse, the churches and buildings as far west as Dickinson College were hit and damaged. Many private homes also received direct fire. Also targeted were the Carlisle Gas Works on E High Street which erupted in a fire ball. Gen. Stuart also dispatched southern units to set some buildings at Carlisle Barracks on fire.

But the shelling was concentrated on the Square, the very space in which we stand. At this moment, 150 years ago, this was a very dangerous place. In the mid evening, shells hit the column of the Court House and under the front right window. These and other scars, "Lee's Calling Cards" are still visible, and on the Courthouse column the date, July 1, 1863, was later emblazed in white paint.

It was a night to remember. Residents were terrified. Those with enough courage to peer out their windows and look east were horrified to see the night sky glow with the great fires over the Gas Works and Carlisle Barracks. Soldiers wearing both blue and grey collapsed when not on duty and no one had the energy to engage in a full scale battle; nor to give up.

Narrator 1

After midnight, as the standoff continued and the Confederate intermittent cannon fire slackened, southern messengers arrived from Gen. Robert E. Lee. Only then did JEB Stuart learn that a great battle had been fought that day in Gettysburg. The Confederate Cavalry were ordered to ride immediately south, towards the great battle.

Gen. Stuart and staff skirted the town at 1:00 and started the trek to Gettysburg in the darkness of the night, while the artillery shelling finally ceased. Gen. Fitzhugh Lee turned his brigade south on the Petersburg Road at 3:00 and followed his commander, but not before his cannons fired a defiant final three rounds at Carlisle.

(Confederate cannon fire a final time)

The Shelling was finally over, some eight hours after it had first begun.

When dawn broke several hours later, the townspeople and Union forces surveyed the damage. The buildings at the Barracks were still smoldering. The carcass of a dead horse lay in front of the First Presbyterian Church.

In total 18 Union soldiers were wounded, one Private Charles Colliday, mortally wounded on N. Hanover Street between the two churches. He would become the northern most casualty of the Gettysburg campaign.

Gen. Baldy Smith became a folk hero of Carlisle. He would serve as the president of a company and on the board of the police commissioners of New York City. He is buried in the hallowed ground of the Arlington National Cemetery.

In September 1863, after the Shelling, the ladies of Carlisle sent Gen. Smith a beautiful silver pitcher, with a note thanking him for defending their city. That silver pitcher is now on special display at the Cumberland County Historical Society Civil War exhibit.

Historians will forever debate how the Battle of Gettysburg, the High Watermark of the Confederacy and the turning point of the Civil War, might have ended differently had JEB Stuart not been detained that night in Carlisle. When his weary troops arrived on the Gettysburg battlefield late on Thursday, July 2 they were clearly spent from their ordeal. The next day they were defeated in a battle which has become a footnote to the dramatic and climatic “Picket’s Charge”.

Mark-

Tonight we honor the courage of the people of Carlisle on July 1, 1863. And we honor the soldiers, on both sides, who faced each other that night. President Abraham Lincoln, at the dedication of the Gettysburg Battlefield cemetery the following November, delivered these immortal words

“..in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract....It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

(Band plays “Dixie” while Confederate forces march to the Square and halt on the east side. Then the band plays the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” as Union forces march from W. High Street and halt on the west side of the Square.)

(A Bugler plays taps.)

(Band plays God Bless America or similar)