

“The Battle [of Piedmont] is scarcely more than mentioned...yet the regiments engaged suffered as terribly and fought as bravely as any equal body of troops in any battle of the war.” - Union Col. Thomas F. Wildes, 116th Ohio

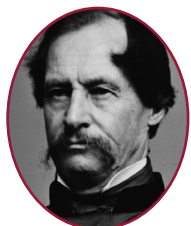
The Piedmont Battlefield can be Saved!



“The Road To Battle”

In the spring of 1864, new Union commander Gen. Ulysses S. Grant organized a huge offensive across the entire front of the embattled Confederacy. Grant’s first push up the Valley under the command of Gen. Franz Sigel had ended in disaster for the Federals when they were driven from the field during the Battle of New Market.

Sigel was quickly replaced by Gen. David “Black Dave” Hunter. By late May, the Federals were on the move again, and by early June they were bearing down on their objective – the vital rail and supply center of Staunton, Virginia.



**UNION GEN. DAVID
“BLACK DAVE” HUNTER**

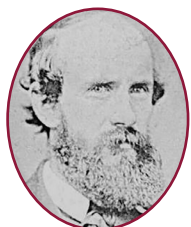
Confederate commander Gen. William E. “Grumble” Jones hurriedly gathered a force – from anywhere from which a man, horse, or gun could be spared – to block Hunter’s advance. He brought them first to Staunton and then sent them north to Mt. Crawford, where Gen. John D. Imboden placed them in a formidable defensive position along the North River. Realizing the strength of the Confederate position, Hunter marched his army southeast to Port Republic on June 4, with the intention of moving south to Waynesboro and cutting the Confederates off from Richmond and resupply. But Jones shifted his own force east to block Hunter’s route south, and sent Imboden and his cavalry to Mt. Meridian, three miles south of Port Republic, to delay the Federal advance.

“THE HORRIBLE MASS OF FIRE-SPITTING RIFLES”

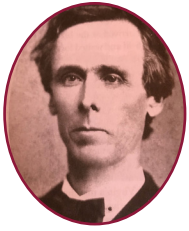
The main part of the Confederate army was in an L-shape, anchored on a bend of Middle River facing north and angling south along the ridge line across the target property. The other part, Confederate reserves consisting of home guards, was in the woods south and east of Piedmont. Between the two parts of Jones’ army was a gap, several hundred yards wide, partially filled by the 60th Virginia.

On the Federal side, one brigade of infantry, under Col. Augustus Moor, advanced on the west. Another brigade, under Col. Joseph Thoburn, was to the east. And Union artillery commanded by Capt. Henry DuPont – 22 guns in all – deployed on the heights to the northeast.

On the west, Moor’s men attacked and were repulsed with heavy losses by a “withering and steady fire” from Confederates who were positioned behind formidable barricades of logs and rails across the target property. Meanwhile, DuPont’s cannon unleashed a hailstorm of metal at the outnumbered Confederate artillery, overwhelming them and driving them from the field.



**CONFEDERATE GEN.
WILLIAM E. “GRUMBLE”
JONES**



CONFEDERATE MAJ. ROBERT MCFARLAND, COMMANDER OF THE 39TH TENNESSEE

THE FATAL GAP: “A STAND-UP FIGHT”

Emboldened by his success in repulsing Moor, the aggressive Jones decided to counterattack, and pulled troops from his right wing to reinforce his left for the assault – including the 60th Virginia, the only force covering the dangerous gap in his line. Seeing the Confederate troops moving, and alerted to the growing gap, Hunter ordered Col. Joseph Thoburn to assault that spot. He also instructed the rest of his force to attack, pressuring the Confederates all along the line and successfully distracting them from Thoburn’s movement.

The Confederates belatedly became aware of Thoburn’s advance. Startled, Jones attempted to hurry troops to fill the gap, including the just departed 60th Virginia and the 39th Tennessee, which had been moved from the right flank to the left. They were too late. Only part of the 60th had reached the area when Thoburn’s three regiments surged up the hill and struck the gap. The 34th Massachusetts advanced, absorbed a volley from the Virginians, and charged, letting out a yell “that could have been heard for a mile.” The 60th Virginia “poured lead [like] hail stones” into the Federals, and the two sides “had a fair stand up fight for about twenty minutes,” as one Massachusetts soldier remembered – “when suddenly a heavy fire broke out on our left.”



UNION COL. GEORGE D. WELLS, COMMANDER OF THE 34TH MASSACHUSETTS.

“SHOOT THAT OFFICER!”

That fire came from Col. Kenton Harper’s Augusta Reserves hurrying up from the south. They struck the flank of the 34th Massachusetts and “poured a withering fire into our faces,” as one northerner remembered. But the commander of the 34th, Col. George Wells, steadied his troops, who held their ground and fought in two directions. In some places, the two sides engaged in savage hand to-hand fighting. As the 54th Pennsylvania added their fire in support, the pressure on the Confederates became too great, and their line began to give way.

Grumble Jones tried to rally his men. Lt. Monroe Blue of the Augusta Reserves responded, shouting, “General, I will lead them – boys follow me!” but a Union officer shouted, “Shoot that officer before he starts a rally!” and, as one Federal remembered, “Several of us cut loose at him and he spun around, dropped his sword, and fell to the ground.” Blue died instantly, along with his abortive charge.

As the Confederate line began to crumble, Jones rushed into the confusion, urging his men to hold their ground. It was the last act of his life. A Union bullet struck him in the temple and killed him instantly. The Confederate defense collapsed, and the retreat became a rout, with the Confederates streaming southward.

POST BATTLE: THE FALL OF STAUNTON

As the Confederates retreated south towards Waynesboro, the way to Staunton and Lexington was clear. Hunter set out on “Hunter’s Raid,” marching into Staunton the next day, destroying military stores and seizing Confederate clothing and munitions depots, and then burning the Virginia Military Institute days later. Hunter continued to push south until he was thwarted by Jubal Early at Lynchburg and fled into the mountains of West Virginia – clearing the way for Early to embark on what would be the last great invasion of the North.

Union Gen. Julius Stahel being helped back onto his horse after being wounded in the arm. Stahel would receive the Medal of Honor for his actions at Piedmont. Image from Death of Valor.

SHENANDOAH VALLEY BATTLEFIELDS FOUNDATION

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