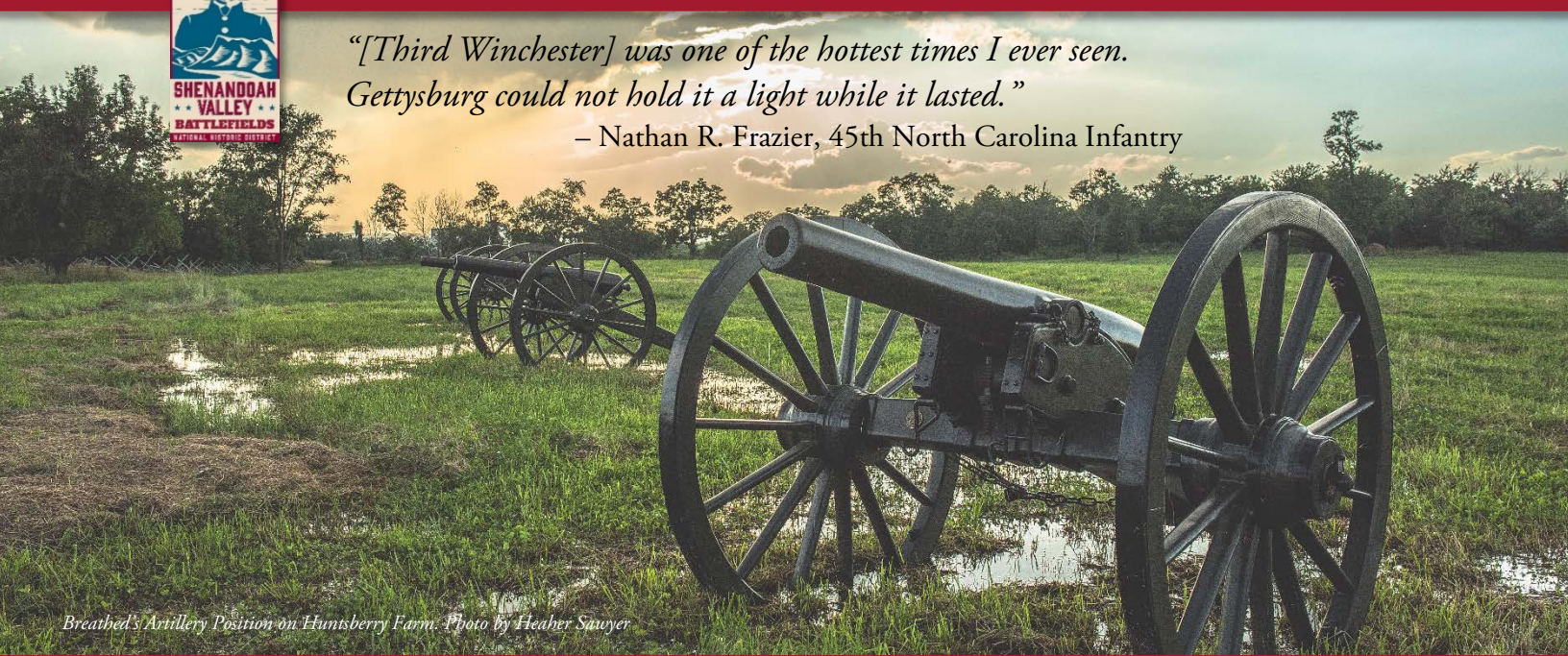




# HELP SAVE THIRD WINCHESTER

*"[Third Winchester] was one of the hottest times I ever seen. Gettysburg could not hold it a light while it lasted."*

– Nathan R. Frazier, 45th North Carolina Infantry



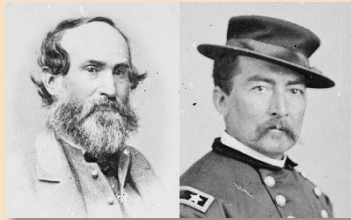
*Breathed's Artillery Position on Huntsberry Farm. Photo by Heather Sawyer*

## THE THIRD BATTLE OF WINCHESTER (SEPTEMBER 19, 1864)

### THE ROAD TO BATTLE

In the fall of 1864, Union Gen. Philip Sheridan was sent to the Shenandoah Valley to bring an end to Confederate control of the area. Uncertain of the size of Confederate Gen. Jubal Early's army, and unwilling to risk a politically disastrous defeat, Sheridan was cautious at first, and the initial clashes between the opposing forces were small and relatively indecisive.

Early mistakenly believed that Sheridan's caution reflected a lack of aggressiveness, and felt safe in dividing his forces between Winchester and Martinsburg to wreck the B&O railroad. Learning of Early's risky maneuvers, and that one of Early's divisions had left for Richmond, Sheridan moved to attack, but his slow advance through the narrow Berryville Canyon gave Early time to concentrate his forces – setting the stage for the decisive battle of September 19, 1864.



*Early and Sheridan*

Third Winchester became the largest battle ever fought in the Valley. Over 54,000 men clashed and over 8,600 became casualties in a ferocious see-saw struggle that saw the Confederates gradually forced back into an L-shaped line north and east of Winchester – until a final decisive attack by federal infantry and cavalry struck the Confederate left flank, breaching the defenders' lines and sending the Confederates "whirling through Winchester."

### THE HUNTSBERRY FARM

The Huntsberry property was at the center of the day's fighting. The portion north of Red Bud Run was the site of key Confederate and Union artillery positions, and a Union flanking maneuver that helped push the Confederates back to their final line. The southern portion contains parts of the First Woods and Middle Field, where the fighting was so intense, and so costly, that it was later called "that basin of Hell." The Middle Field witnessed more than 3,000 casualties.



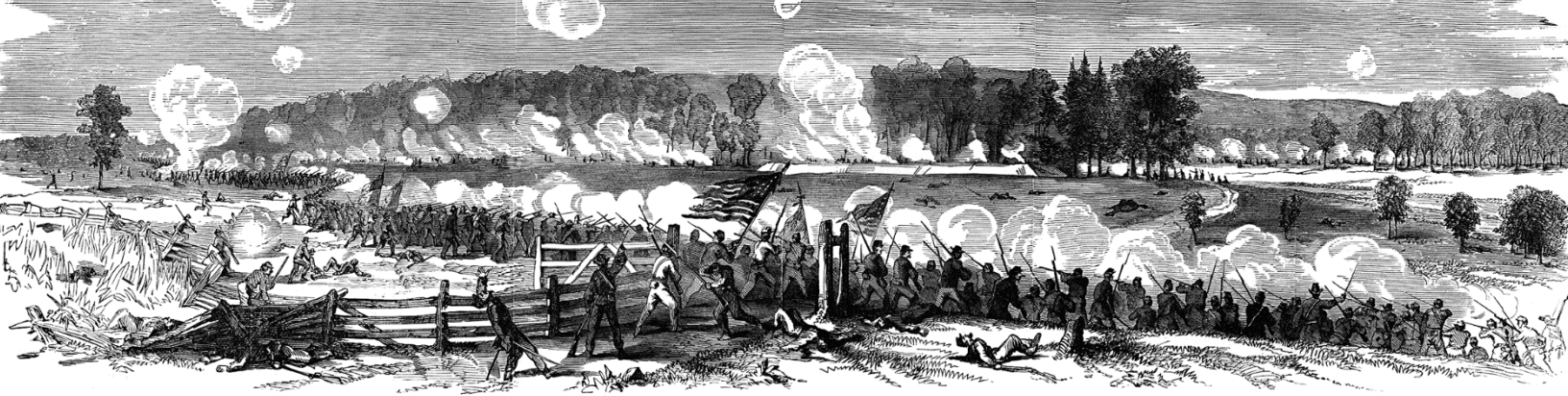
*Photo by Buddy Secor*

### "THE IMPENDING CARNAGE": THE BATTLE BEGINS

Resting in the First Woods before the Union attack on the morning of September 19, 1864, one soldier remembered that "There was little premonition of the impending carnage," and described "the most beautiful of autumn days." That beauty would soon be shattered.

At 11:40 am, a Federal signal gun boomed, and Union troops of the XIX Corps started across the Middle Field on the Huntsberry Property towards the Second Woods. "Quickly the men came into the sunshine," one Union soldier wrote. "Before them was a broad, undulating field, and there, upon the opposite edge, along the border of a forest, was a long line of rebels in full view..." One Union soldier later remembered the sight of "dense masses of men, in brownish-gray with glittering bayonets."

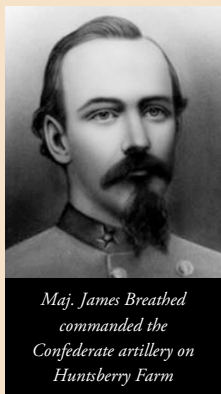




*The XIX Corps fighting in the Middle Field— from Frank Leslie's Famous Leaders and Battle Scenes of the Civil War*

### “THE EARTH...SEEMED TO TREMBLE”

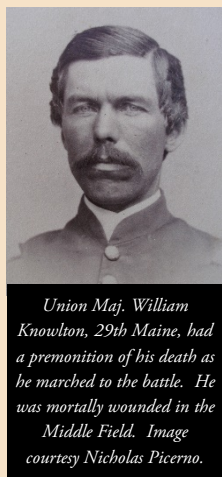
The advancing Federals were faced with a murderous hail of shot and shell – not only from the front, but also from their right, where Confederate artillery positioned on Huntsberry Farm in the heights across Red Bud Run sent shells tearing into their flank. One southerner remembered that the artillery “made lanes in this mass of the enemy,” and another that “the earth around them seemed to tremble.” A Union soldier recalled that “the ground fairly worked under our feet and there is one great mystery [sic] that is how we ever so many of us got off alive.” Many did not.



*Maj. James Breathed commanded the Confederate artillery on Huntsberry Farm*

### “THEIR DEADLY BUSINESS”

After a series of attacks and counterattacks across the Middle Field, the main thrust of the XIX Corps attack was repulsed by 1 p.m. Each side had suffered horrific casualties. “The men on both lines were nearly all old soldiers who knew their deadly business,” said one Union soldier. The Confederates on this part of the battlefield, under the command of Gen. John B. Gordon, were some of the finest in the Confederate army. A Union soldier described how “The veterans of Stonewall Jackson fired amazingly low, so that the grass and earth in front of the Regiment was cut and torn up by a perfect sheet of lead...Blood was on everything.” Eventually the firing on the field sputtered out from sheer exhaustion.



*Union Maj. William Knowlton, 29th Maine, had a premonition of his death as he marched to the battle. He was mortally wounded in the Middle Field. Image courtesy Nicholas Picerno.*

### “LOOK OUT FOR OUR RIGHT”

To break the stalemate, Sheridan ordered Gen. George Crook to bring up his Army of West Virginia, with instructions to “look out for our right.” Crook sent Col. Joseph Thoburn’s division west into the First Woods and took Col. Isaac Duval’s division across Red Bud Run to the heights around Huntsberry Farm. As Duval’s troops climbed up the opposite bank and then headed west there was no enemy to block their advance. Breathed’s Confederate artillery had been sent off to support other positions.

### “I NEVER SAW SO MANY WOUNDED”

Just west of the Huntsberry house, Crook deployed Duval’s brigades into a line of battle – including a brigade commanded by Col. (and future U.S. President) Rutherford B. Hayes. At 3 p.m., “with a tremendous shout which resounded along the lines,” Duval launched his attack, surging down the ridge towards Red Bud Run. But Confederate fire on their flank tore into the attackers. “I never saw so many wounded, and killed, by artillery,” said Union surgeon Harris Beecher. Duval himself fell wounded, and Hayes took command of the division. The Federals continued down the slope only to have the attack initially stall at Red Bud Run itself, which at this point became “a deep slough, twenty or thirty yards wide.” Despite their struggles, and the lethal Confederate fire, the Federals finally made it across.

Concurrently, Thoburn attacked from the east, across the Middle Field. Assailed from the front, and hearing the sounds of Duval’s attack to his rear, Gordon pulled his troops back to defensive positions further west. At the same time, Federal assaults on other parts of the battlefield also pushed back the outmanned Confederates. The southerners now held their final defensive position, an L-shaped line north and east of Winchester.

The stage was set for the final Federal attacks – including a thunderous cavalry charge – which collapsed the Confederate line, sent the southerners spilling through the streets of Winchester, and earned a critical, war-changing victory for the Federals.

### “THE HARDEST FIGHTING I EVER WAS IN”

Third Winchester was one of the pivotal battles of the Civil War, and spelled the beginning of the end for Confederate primacy in the Valley. Additional northern victories at Fisher’s Hill (September 22), Tom’s Brook (October 9), and Cedar Creek (October 19), coupled with the devastation of the region’s agricultural bounty in the Burning, gave the Union permanent control of the Valley, aided Abraham Lincoln’s reelection, and helped speed the surrender of Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox the following spring.

Confederate Pvt. Nathan Frazier represented the soldiers’ experiences when he wrote, “It was the hottest fighting I ever was in and I have bin in 21 batles and i hope i never will be in another.”