

fire as long as possible with no time to limber up, Thompson ordered the battery to retire "firing with the prolonge." The prolonge was the thick rope attached to the gun's trail; the maneuver relied upon the men or horse teams to drag the piece backward after each shot. While dangerous to execute under fire, the movement kept the weapon firing and moving to the rear at the same time:

The Charge was made in direction of [the] main line of Batteries and I fired into them as they approached and passed the front of my Battery, and fired into them when they had passed. Seeing them turn some of the Captured guns on me, I retired firing with the Prolonge but finding them gaining on me as they were advancing at a run, I limbered up and attempted to pass through the woods in [the] rear hotly pursued. On arriving at the fence on [the] opposite side I found them ahead, when I wheeled to the left... seeing that I was fired on from both front and rear, I directed the men to run and with the aid of our revolvers were able to get clear with the exception of a few who were wounded, and one of the 105th [New York regiment] attached, shot dead. The guns that were saved kept more to the left and the half that made over my captured guns enabled the others to escape on reaching the old Stone Bridge.¹⁵

The battery escaped with the rest of the Union army, losing ten men, three guns, and 20 horses. Thompson's men earned the praise of Gen. Ricketts, in

command on Porter's right, "Captain Thompson's Pennsylvania batteries... deserve to be mentioned not only for their uniform attention to their duties, but for their efficiency throughout the 30th of August." The Confederate commander whose units overtook Thompson's battery admitted, "the enemy's artillery was served with great skill and effect upon our troops during the entire engagement, to which our greatest loss on the left must be attributed."¹⁶

Refitting after the battle, the battery received four, new 10-Pdr. Parrott rifles.¹⁷ At Antietam, Thompson again found himself at the center of a Union corps-level attack, again demonstrating skill and coolness under fire. Battery C, now attached to Rickett's Division of Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker's I Corps, took up position adjacent to the infamous Miller cornfield. Thompson's men engaged in counter-battery fire in support of Rickett's men, first with one rebel battery, then another, as they moved forward on Hooker's right. As the infantry swept forward, Thompson moved his battery closer to the Confederates, firing from a high knoll in the center of the cornfield. The men fired shell with one and two-second fuses, as many of Rickett's men were in front of the guns. His exposed position brought him the attention of Confederate artillery and musket fire:

I had frequently to cease firing so the smoke would clear off to enable me to see

the enemy so as to make my fire more effective, which may have led to the belief that my guns were silenced. I continued in action for some time after the terrible repulse given to the enemy in front of the cornfield when I concluded to retire having at the time one half of my Cannoneers hit and came into action again in the grass field. Before that I could unlimber one half of my Horses fell Dead. I then concluded to retire and give place to a more efficient Battery, leaving 2 of my guns in the grass field until I could bring up the teams of the Forge & Battery wagon to haul them off.¹⁸

At one point the battery was under such intense fire from a Confederate regiment only 75 yards away, that their musket fire disabled one of Thompson's gun carriages. Nine rounds passed through the limber chest, cutting most of his men down but not detonating the charges inside. Thompson lost 11 men wounded, one mortally, and 13 horses killed.¹⁹

At Fredericksburg in Dec. 1862, Battery C crossed the Rappahannock on the lower pontoon bridges with the rest of Maj. Gen. John Reynolds's I Corps. Now attached to Brig. Gen. John Gibbon's Division, Battery C went into action on the right of Gibbon's men as they attacked the Confederate line south of town. Thompson and his men protected Gibbon's flank, moving forward with the infantry. The battery engaged the rebels continuously, at the cost of two men wounded and two horses killed.



Battery D, 2d (i.e. 5th?) U.S. Artillery, going into action on south side of Rappahannock River below Fredericksburg, Va., June 4, 1863. (Library of Congress)