

Battery C arrived on the Chancellorsville battlefield early on the morning of May 2, 1863. They were briefly ordered to the front early the next day, but were ordered back to the reserve artillery. On May 5, Thompson's men recrossed the Rappahannock and went into positions protecting the United States Ford river crossing as the Army of Potomac withdrew. Their losses were one man killed and three wounded.

The Pennsylvania Battery F of Captain Robert B. Hampton was also at Chancellorsville. Known as the "Pittsburgh Battery," many men in Battery F knew Thompson's men. Battery F mustered into Union army service one month after Thompson's battery. Attached to the XII Corps, Battery F was roughly handled by the Confederates near the Chancellor house. During the first three days of fighting, the unit sustained "severe" losses, including Hampton who was mortally wounded. Thompson's own losses to this point in the war had not been replaced, so both units were well below strength. Effective June 3, 1863, as the Army of the Potomac reorganized yet again, Special Orders 151 designated that both batteries be combined and report to the newly-enlarged Artillery Reserve and the First Volunteer Brigade of Lieutenant-Colonel Freeman McGilvery. The new battery also received six 3-inch Ordnance rifles to replace the Parrotts and Napoleons. That same day, across the river, Confederate General Robert E. Lee's men began their march north.²⁰

Thompson watched the III Corps batteries along the Emmitsburg Road and took in the view. They were firing west toward a long tree line along a low, north-south ridge. In front of the trees, which Thompson could only occasionally see through the smoke, were Confederate batteries. *My God, that must be their entire corps artillery*, Thompson thought to himself. For a solid mile, 16 batteries in a long row were trained on Sickles' men positioned along the roads north and east

of the Peach Orchard. Most batteries were mixed, 20-Pdr. Parrotts, Napoleons, 3-inch rifles, and some smaller howitzers filled the fields. They were close, too. At the intersection of the farm road and the Emmitsburg Road, the closest Confederate batteries were only 500 yards away.

At that point, Btry. G, 1st N.Y. Arty. under Capt. Nelson Ames was banging away at the rebel guns at point blank range with his six Napoleons. Ames was also attached to the Artillery Reserve but not in McGilvery's Bde. Ames had been at the orchard supporting Sickles for about an hour when McGilvery and his brigade arrived. Having lost seven men, Ames was almost out of ammunition. "The men were nearly exhausted from their activities, but when they were told they must drive back the enemy lines so the battery could limber up in order to fall back, they nobly responded to the call. The guns began to pour forth a stream of fire and death," Ames remembered later.²¹

McGilvery coolly and deliberately began placing his batteries. Three III Corps batteries were already employed north of Ames, trading fire with the batteries to the west.²² Three III Corps infantry regiments shared the road with them: men of the 114th, 105th and 57th Penn. Inf. were interspersed between the batteries and occupying the farm on the west side of the road. McGilvery realized there was also a threat to the south, no Federal guns were yet trained in that direction. Four new Confederate batteries had appeared at the southern end of their line, and those guns began firing north toward the orchard.

McGilvery decided to take advantage of the farm road bordering the orchard. Along the road, he posted his five batteries: farthest to the east was the 9th Mass. Btry. under Capt. John Bigelow, firing six Napoleons. Next in line to the west was the 5th Mass. Btry. E with six 3-inch rifles commanded by Capt. Charles A. Phillips. To the west of Phillips, McGilvery placed the six

3-inch rifles of the 10th Ind. Btry., N.Y. Lt. Arty., which had been attached to Phillips's battery since Chancellorsville. Further west was the 15th N.Y. Lt. Arty. under Capt. Patrick Hart, with four Napoleons. Those 22 guns provided support for four regiments on lower ground in the orchard itself: the 68th and 141st Penn. Inf., the 2nd N.H. Inf., and the 3rd Maine. The 3rd Michigan formed a skirmish line in a wide arc south of the orchard.²³

Last in line was Thompson's Battery C & F. McGilvery ordered Thompson to relieve Ames, who retired his battery section by section. Thompson was thus posted holding the right flank of McGilvery's line. He spaced his guns along the north edge of the orchard, section by section, and discovered they would not all fit east of the Emmitsburg Road. He ordered the right section, under Lt. James Stephenson, across the road to the farmhouse owned by Reverend Joseph Sherfy. Stephenson placed one gun "between Sherfy's barn and the garden fence, the other gun on the Emmitsburg Pike," both facing west.²⁴

It wasn't long before Thompson was under fire. "We were in position but a few minutes when the enemy opened on the right sector on [the] road with about 20 guns with canister... The first discharge swept the right section out of position like a whirlwind." Thompson ordered Stephenson to hold his ground, although his section remained within extreme, but still lethal, Confederate canister fire. Later, Thompson remembered "seeing that he could do nothing, [Stephenson] ordered the men to cover and in a few minutes three gun horses were all killed. His saddle horse [was] badly wounded and the revolver broken in the holster, all by canister shot. Abb Link [was] mortally wounded and Edward O'Donnell crippled for life." Thompson's left and center sections in the orchard were now about to come under fire.²⁵

Two columns of Confederate infantry stepped out of the woods to the