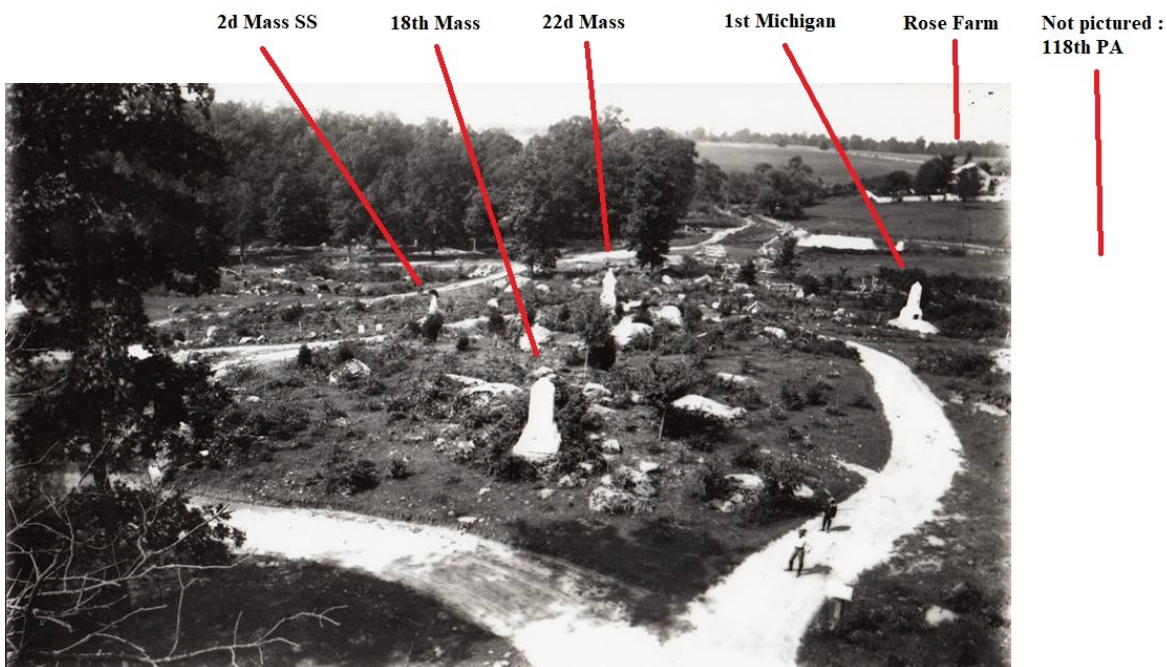


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**A Pair of Gettysburg Retreats by Tilton's Brigade  
as Described  
in Primary Accounts and in the Infantry Tactics  
by  
Mark Silas Tackitt**

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Pressed heavily in front and soon to be overlapped on the right, the time had arrived for Tilton's federal brigade on Gettysburg's Stony Hill to retreat and reform rearward.

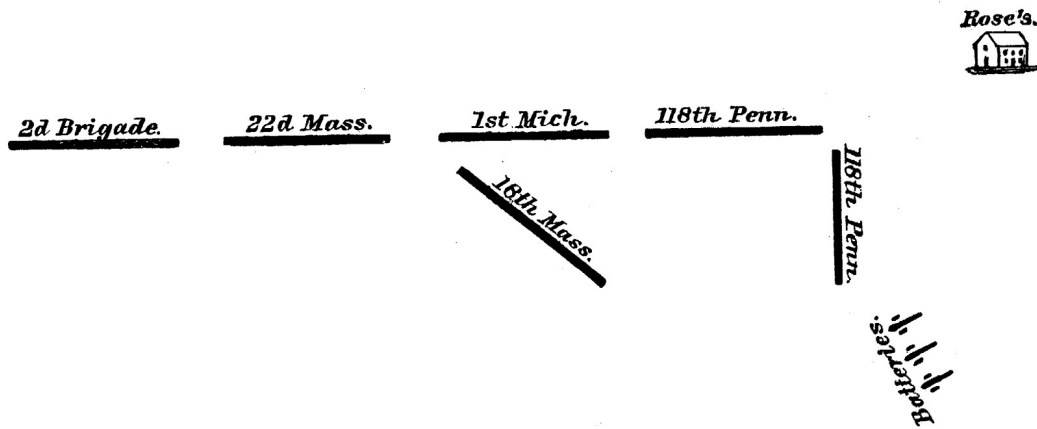
“My colonels wished to advance. Being anxious about my right, however, I reconnoitered in person and discovered the enemy in large force coming from the direction of Rose's house, with the evident design of outflanking me. I immediately retired and took up a new position (in two lines), at the left and rear of a battery which had been posted about 300 yards to my right and rear.”<sup>1</sup>

Gettysburg was Brig. Gen. James Barnes' first time commanding a division in battle. He was a West Point classmate of Robert E. Lee and solid brigade commander with long service in the Army of the Potomac. Upon arriving at the battlefield, one of his brigades had been severed from his command sent to the army's extreme left to defend Little Round Top. He and his remaining two, understrength brigades would battle and retreat from the Stony Hill and the Wheat Field.

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<sup>1</sup>*Report of Col. William S. Tilton, commanding First Brigade, OR 27 Pt. I, pp. 607-08.*

In retreating, the regiments of Tilton's Brigade each changed direction from facing south to facing west. The specific movements of the 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan and 18<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts are not well established. However, the movements of the 118<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania and 22<sup>nd</sup> Massachusetts are :



—Rather than wheel forward to the right, individual companies of the 118<sup>th</sup> PA wheeled *backward* on left most company.

—Rather than wheel at all, individual companies of the 22<sup>nd</sup> MA faced right, wheeled by file twice and before proceeding rearward.

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### ACCOUNT OF THE 118<sup>TH</sup> PENNSYLVANIA

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"A change of front or a disorderly break would alone prevent capture or annihilation. Discipline, firmness, courage were in readiness, and in response to Colonel Gwyn's order, repeated in the stentorian tones of Major Herring, ringing out above the din of battle, "*Change front to the rear on 10th Company, battalion about face, by company, right half wheel, march!*" the regiment, under all this withering pelting fire, executed the movement with as much alacrity, precision and detail as it ever did on any parade occasion.

The rest of the brigade had also executed a similar manoeuvre which changed the entire front in the new direction. The position of the organization was so far altered as to bring the brigade into two lines, the 118th still retaining the right of the first line."<sup>2</sup>

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#### Change of Front Rearward on the Left Company

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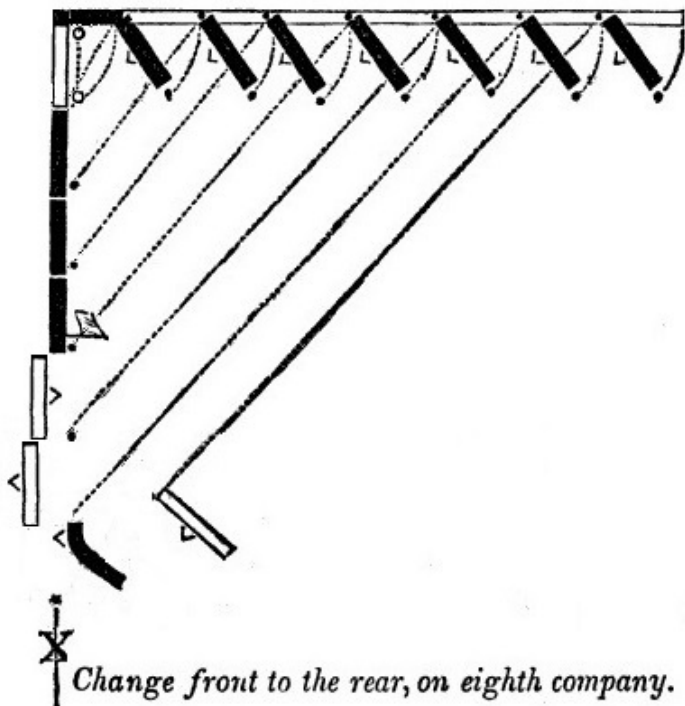
*Concept* : Wheeling a line of battle rearward to the left.

*Performed by* : Wheeling and turning.

*Nuance* : Companies face about, march, pass new line, face about again, and then dress. Battle line faces right.

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<sup>2</sup>Survivors' Association, "History of the 118th Pennsylvania Volunteers: Corn Exchange Regiment," p. 245, (J.L. Smith, Philadelphia, 1905).



HB 771 / CB 867. The colonel will cause a change of front on the left company of the battalion to the rear, according to the same principles and by inverse means [as in HB 760 / CB 852, below.]

HB 760 / CB 852. The colonel, wishing to change front to the rear on the [left] company, will impart his purpose to the captain of this company. The latter will immediately face his company about, wheel it to the [right] on the fixed pivot, and halt it when it shall be in the direction indicated to him by the colonel ; the captain will then face his company to the front, and align it by the [left] against the two markers, whom the colonel will cause to be established before the right and left files.

HB 761 / CB 854. These dispositions being made, the colonel will command :

1. *Change front to the rear, on [eighth (or last)] company.*
2. *Battalion, about—FACE.*
3. *By company, [right] half wheel.*
4. *MARCH (or double quick—MARCH).*

HB 762 / CB 855. At the second command, all the companies, except the right, will face about.

HB 763 / CB 857. At the third, the captains, whose companies have faced about, will each place himself behind the centre of his company, two paces from the front rank, now the rear.

HB 764 / CB 859. At the fourth, these companies will wheel to the [right] on the fixed pivot by the rear rank ; the [right] guide of each will, as soon as he is able to pass, place himself on the [right] of the rear rank of his company, now become the [left] ; and when the colonel shall judge that the companies have sufficiently wheeled, he will command :

5. *Forward.*
6. *MARCH.*
7. *Guide [right].*

[766.] [At the sixth command,] the guide of each company on its [left] flank, become [right], will conform himself to the principles prescribed, HB 748 / CB 836, by :

- ceasing to wheel at the command, *forward*, and
- marching straight forward.

HB 765 / CB 860. At the sixth command, the companies will cease to wheel, march straight forward towards the new line of battle, and, at the seventh, take the touch of the elbow towards the [right].

HB \_\_\_ / CB 861. The guide of each company on its right flank becomes left, will conform himself to the principles prescribed HB 749 / CB 837.

HB 749 / CB 837. The right guide of the second company will march straight-forward until this company shall arrive at the point where it should turn to the right ; each succeeding right guide

will follow the file immediately before him at the cessation of the wheel, and will march in the trace of this file until this company shall turn to the right to move the line; this guide will then march straight forward.

HB 767 / CB 862. The second company, from the [left], having arrived opposite to the [right] of the first, will turn to the [right] ; the guide will so direct himself as to arrive parallel with the line of battle, cross that line, and when the front rank, now in the rear, shall be three paces beyond it, the captain will command :

1. *Second company* ;
2. HALT.

HB 768 / CB 863. At the second command, the company will halt ; the files which may not yet be in line with the guide, will promptly come into it ; the captain will cause the company to face about, and then align it by the [left].

HB 769 / CB 864. All the other companies will execute what has just been prescribed for the second, each as it successively arrives opposite to the [right] of the company that precedes it on the new line of battle.

HB 770 / CB 866. The formation being ended, the colonel will command :

*Guides—POSTS.*<sup>3</sup>

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ACCOUNT OF THE 22<sup>nd</sup> MASSACHUSETTS

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“Hood's Division, Longstreet's Corps [ ] had charged, and swinging into this gap left between the two corps (Third and Fifth), soon doubled back the right and left, and with exultant yells had pressed around and overlapped us. We were *flanked*. The command "***Change front to the rear by the right flank!***" was passed along the line, for no orders by voice or bugle could now be heard above the roar and din of battle. We knew what it meant. It was not executed tactically, nor can such an order be under conditions of battle, for the tactical units being continually destroyed, the file closers and guides being killed or wounded, it is impossible to restore such units under such a fire.”<sup>4</sup>

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**To Pass a Defile, in Retreat, by the Right Flank.**

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HB 709 / CB 788. When a battalion, retiring in line, shall encounter a defile which it must pass, the colonel will halt the battalion, and face it to the front.

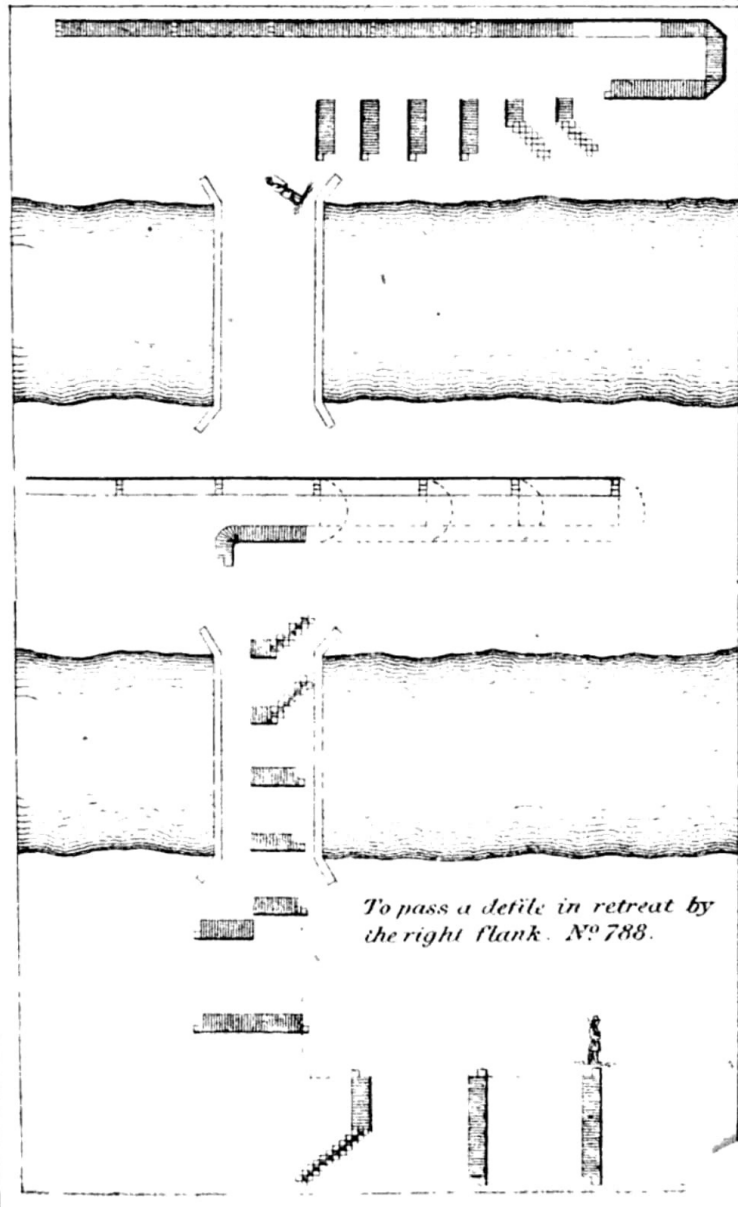
HB 710 / CB 789. It will be supposed that the defile is in rear of the left flank, and that its width is sufficient to give passage to a column by platoon ; the colonel will place a marker fifteen or twenty paces in rear of the file closers at the point around which the subdivisions will have to change direction in order to enter the defile ; he will then command :

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<sup>3</sup>Casey, Brig. Gen. Silas, Vol. II, Infantry Tactics (New York : D. Van Nostrand, 1862)

Hardee, Brig. Gen. William Joseph, Vol. II : "Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics," (Mobile: S.H. Goetzel, 1861)

<sup>4</sup>Carter, Robert Goldthwaite, "Four Brothers in Blue," (Gen'l Books LLC, 2010), p. 309.



*To the rear, by the right flank,  
pass the defile.*

HB 711 / CB 790. The captain of the first company will immediately command :

1. *First company, right - FACE.*
2. *MARCH (or double quick - MARCH).*

HB 712 / CB 791. At the command, *march*, the first company will commence the movement ; the first file will wheel to the right, march to the rear till it shall have passed four paces beyond the file closers, when it will wheel again to the right, and then direct itself straight forward towards the left flank. All the other files of this company will come to wheel in succession at the same place where the first had wheeled.

HB 713 / CB 792. The second company will execute, in its turn, the same movement, by the commands of its captain, who will give the command, *march*, so that the first file of his company may immediately follow the last of the first, without constraint, however, as to taking the step of the first; the first file of the second company will

wheel to the right, on its ground ; all the other files of this company will come in succession to wheel at the same place. The following companies will execute, each in its turn, what has just been prescribed for the second.

HB 714 / CB 793. When the whole of the second company shall be on the same direction with the first, the captain of the first will cause it to form, by platoon, into line, and the moment that it is in column, the guide of the first platoon will direct himself on the marker around whom he has to change direction in order to enter the defile.

HB 715 / CB 794. The second company will continue to march by the flank, directing itself parallel with the line of battle ; and it, in its turn, will form by platoon into line, when the third company shall be wholly on the same direction with itself.

HB 716 / CB 795. The following companies will successively execute what has just been prescribed for the second, and each will form by platoon into line, when the next company shall

be on the same direction with itself.

HB 717 / CB 796. The first platoon of the leading company having arrived opposite to the marker placed at the entrance of the defile, will turn to the left, and the following platoons will all execute this movement at the same point. As the last companies will not be able to form platoons before reaching the defile, they will so direct themselves, in entering it, as to leave room to the left for this movement.

HB 718 / CB 797. The battalion will thus pass the defile by platoon ; and, as the two platoons of each company shall clear it, companies will be successively formed by the means indicated, school of the company, HC 273 / CC 278, and following.

HB 719 / CB 798. The head of the column having cleared the defile, and having reached the distance at which the colonel wishes to re-form line faced to the defile, he may cause the leading company to turn to the left, to prolong the column in that direction, and then form it to the left into line of battle ; or he may halt the column, and form it into line of battle faced to the rear.

HB \_\_\_ / CB 799. If it be the intention of the colonel to commence the fire before the whole column is disengaged from the defile, he may cause the leading company, when it has formed to change direction to the right, and then form on the right into line ; or, that company may change direction to the left, and then the formation will be on the left into line by inversion.

HB 720 / CB 800. If the defile be in the rear of the right flank, it will be passed by the left; the movement will be executed according to the same principles, and by inverse means.

HB 721 / CB 801. If the defile be too narrow to receive the front of a platoon, it will be passed by the flank. Captains and file closers will be watchful that the files do not lose their distances in marching. Companies or platoons will be formed into line as the width of the defile may permit, or as the companies shall successively clear it.

