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**Des Moines
Civil War
Roundtable**

**April 2025
Headquarters District Iowa
General Order No. 500**

- The **Fourth meeting** of the Spring campaign will **April 16** at the **The Machine Shed**

The bar will open at 5:30 with the meal served at 6:30.

- Our program **Leo Landis** (State Historical Society of Iowa Curator) *The U.S. 60th Colored Troops - A Demographic Overview*
- Meal choices **Chicken Chardonnay & Old Fashion Pot Roast** at **\$24.00**
- **Reservations & payment** will be accepted until **April 13**.

By command of Brigadier General Gordon McKenzie

Our web address www.dmcivilwar.com

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For many it is time to renew your membership in the DMCWRT.
\$30.00 Newsletter via email
\$35.00 Newsletter via USPS
\$40.00 for Family

The following members have expiring dues--

Tom Alberts 1-1	Gene Capps 3-1	David Connon 4-1	Kathy Hillard 2-1
Gerald Ingrisano 2-1	Phil Kotz 3-1	Larry McDougell 2-1	Dave Moraniec 3-1
Tim Orr 2-1	Garry Ripperger 1-1		

If there are errors please contact me, and I will correct the error.

Crawford's Controversial Charge: February 7, 1865



By **ECW Guest Post** on March 28,
2025

ECW welcomes back guest author Nigel Lambert.

This article explores a controversial Union frontal assault that has surprisingly evaded detailed scrutiny. The event occurred at the end of Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's eighth Petersburg Offensive (February 5-7, 1865). Late on February 6, a Rebel force, largely the ill William Mahone's division, spearheaded by Brig. Gen. Joseph Finegan, attacked and routed a Union force commanded by Maj. Gen. Gouverneur K. Warren, consisting mostly of his own V Corps troops, around Dabney's Mill. In an embarrassing skedaddle, the panicked Federals fled nearly two miles before taking sanctuary in breastworks constructed the previous day along Hatcher's Run. As darkness descended, the Confederates threw out a strong picket line over their captured terrain. Overnight, all combatants endured a ferocious winter storm. Many wounded soldiers stranded on the battlefield froze to death, and ill-equipped Rebels stripped clothing from the dead.

Despite the Union debacle, it was not until 8:15 a.m. on February 7 that army commander Maj. Gen. George G. Meade (over two miles to the rear) asked Warren for an update. Given the ongoing awful weather and concerns over Warren's troops, Meade refrained from ordering Warren to attack. He directed Warren to send out skirmishers to locate the Rebels and to use his judgment in whether to engage or not.



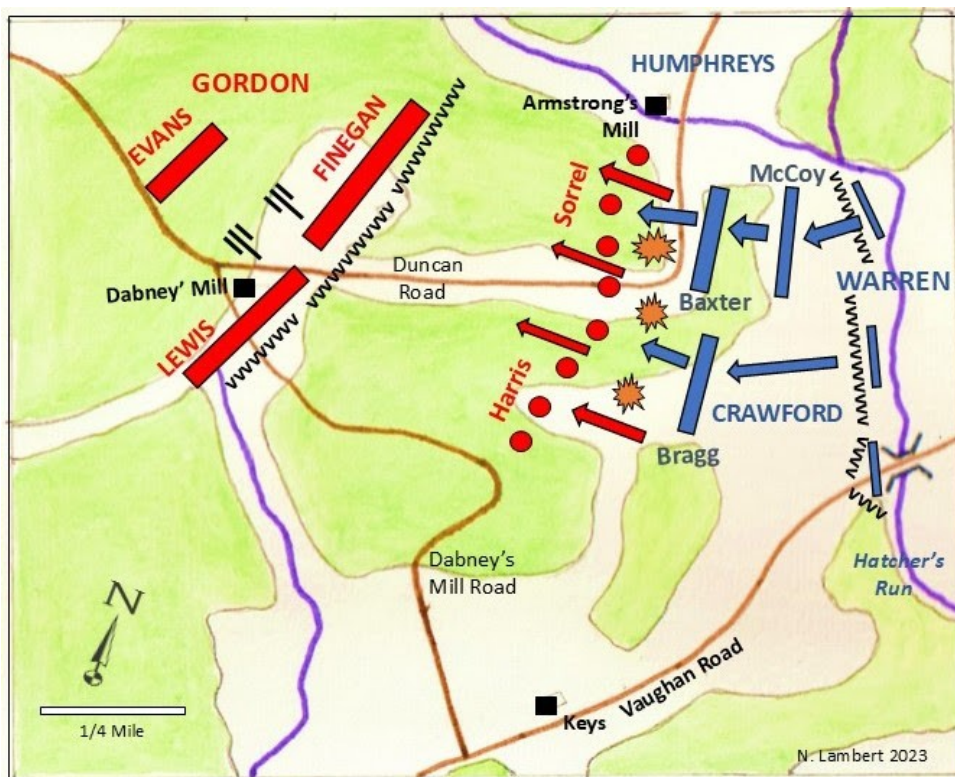
Major General Gouverneur K. Warren

At 9:40 a.m., Warren told Meade he could drive the Rebel skirmishers back to Dabney's Mill, and 20 minutes later, Warren ordered Maj. Gen. Samuel W. Crawford's division (about 4,000 men) to advance. This division had been prominent in the previous day's humiliation.



Maj. Gen. Samuel W. Crawford. Library of Congress

From 10:30 a.m., Crawford's division vacated its breastworks southeast of Armstrong Mill. Brigadier General Henry Baxter's brigade led the Federals out, followed by the brigades of Brig. Gen. Edward S. Bragg and Col. Thomas McCoy. Baxter's troops soon confronted the enemy's pickets and steadily pressed them back. A chilling sleet persisted throughout the day. One Yankee remembered how "the men's hands became so benumbed that it was difficult for them to handle their pieces [rifles]."



Crawford Pushes Back the

Rebel Pickets: February 7, 1865, 10.30 a.m. – 2.00 p.m. Map by Nigel Lambert.

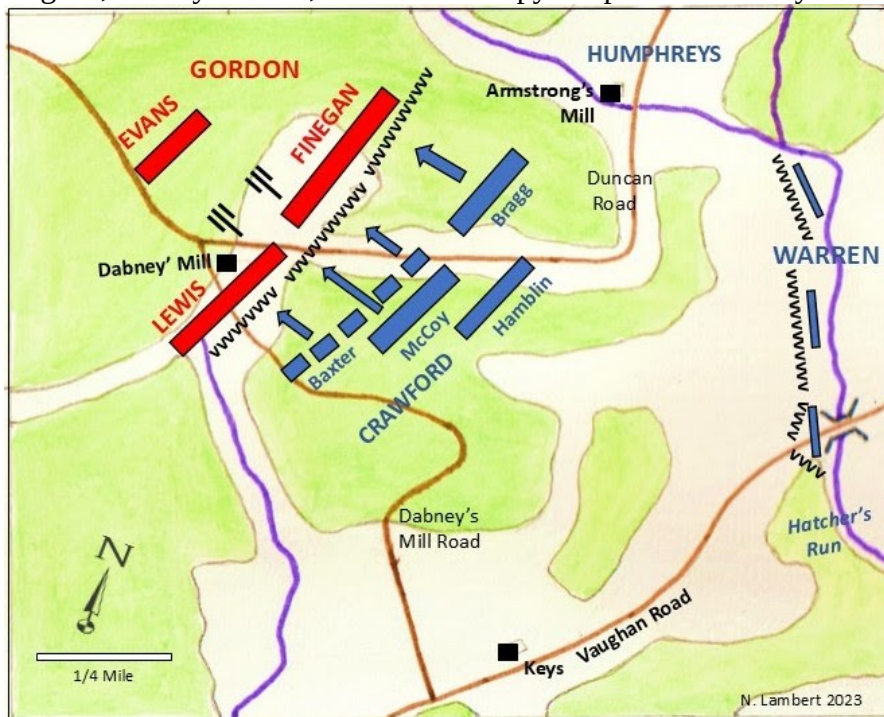
The Confederate pickets came from the brigades of Brig. Gen. Nathaniel H. Harris and Brig. Gen. G. Moxley Sorrel. Harris remembered how the Federals drove back his advanced pickets early in the morning. A sergeant with Sorrel noted how one man froze to death on picket duty. He observed Sorrel standing exposed on top of a breastwork when a Union sharpshooter shot the general. Although severe, Sorrel's wound proved non-fatal.

At 10:50 a.m., Meade updated Grant (over 10 miles away at City Point) and asked whether he should hold or relinquish the newly acquired Hatcher's Run line. Grant instructed Meade to permanently hold and fortify the line from Armstrong's Mill. Given the weather, Grant felt the troops should remain in those positions, and Warren should make no further attack unless it promised significant advantages. At 12:20 p.m., Warren informed Meade that Crawford had carried the enemy's rifle pits near Armstrong's Mill and was pushing his skirmishers out toward the Rebels' main line near Dabney's Mill. Ten minutes later, Meade contacted Warren, saying that considering the weather and Grant's instructions, it was not advisable to attack unless "great advantages will be gained." Despite this message, Warren kept advancing his troops, slowly pushing the Confederate pickets back toward Dabney's Mill. They eventually overran three lines of Rebel rifle pits.

At 3:45 p.m., Warren ordered Crawford to drive the enemy as far as he could in the remaining daylight. After six hours of fighting, Crawford pushed the Confederates back to their strengthened earthworks around Dabney's Mill. At 5:22 p.m., Meade updated Grant, saying that Warren had recovered most of the ground he occupied the previous day and had drawn artillery fire from the

enemy's works. In accomplishing all that had been demanded, Meade had directed Warren to withdraw to Hatcher's Run and help hold the line at Armstrong's Mill.

Major General John B. Gordon commanded the Confederate position at Dabney's Mill. This included two infantry divisions supported by artillery; a further Confederate infantry division lay in reserve. The Federals began digging in just 300 yards from this formidable Rebel line. Crawford prepared to strike the Rebel works. Bragg's brigade moved to the right, with Baxter's men primarily acting as advanced skirmishers in front of McCoy's soldiers. Brigadier General Joseph E. Hamblin's VI Corps brigade, sent by Warren, arrived to occupy the position McCoy would soon vacate.



The Final Federal Assault,

February 7, 1865, 6.00 p.m.
Map by Nigel Lambert.

At about 6:00 p.m., Crawford gave the order to charge the Confederate stronghold. Rebel musketry and withering canister fire soon greeted the Federals, who fled into woods for safety. The Yankees rallied and attacked again, only to suffer the same fate. At 6:20 p.m., Crawford messaged Warren, saying he'd advanced his lines as far as possible with his now exhausted troops.

The sound of heavy firing alarmed Meade, who asked Warren what was happening. An hour later, Warren replied that Crawford had attacked the Rebels and drawn some artillery fire. He continued, "I have had no report from him since it began; it now has ceased." Nightfall and the futility of further assaults curtailed the fighting. It was after midnight before Crawford's tired, freezing, and hungry Union soldiers received orders to withdraw to the earthworks along Hatcher's Run, thereby ending the entire offensive.

This final assault is intriguing. Both Meade and Grant had advised Warren not to attack. Crawford and

his subordinates knew the strength of the artillery-supported Rebel position. Gordon's force outnumbered Crawford's division. By 6:00 p.m., it was virtually dark (sunset was around 5:30 p.m.), too late to launch any meaningful attack. Who instigated this reckless assault? In his official report and subsequent correspondence to Meade, Warren never admitted that a frontal assault occurred. He claimed that at 6:00 p.m., Crawford attacked the enemy, pushing them back to their Dabney's Mill works. Given the presence of Rebel artillery, Warren "did not think it advisable to assault the position." In truth, Crawford had pushed the Rebels back to Dabney's Mill by 5:00 p.m. Warren may have erased the suicidal frontal assault, but there are many formal reports and memoirs from Crawford's troops and Confederate accounts describing the futile charges. Unfortunately, Crawford's battle report is conspicuously absent from the war's official records. Did Warren order Crawford to attack, or did Crawford unilaterally decide to charge the Rebel stronghold? Why did Warren conceal Crawford's hapless charge? Crawford also fortuitously escaped any blame for the previous day's disaster, with Meade and Warren apparently commending his performance. As a postscript, over a month later, a delegation of generals met Warren and asked for Crawford's removal, as his "bungling and what not" caused much trouble. They feared he would eventually cost Warren his command.

Given the previous day's humiliation, one might speculate that Warren and Crawford were desperate to regain some honor. From early morning, Warren showed an eagerness to resume fighting despite the terrible weather and being under no pressure from his superiors to engage. Northern newspapers reported that the February 7 fighting was more substantial than initially believed, adding that the Rebels had "made a determined stand" at their Dabney's Mill works. They claimed Crawford's division lost 71 killed and 519 wounded; a vast overestimation. On February 7, Crawford suffered an estimated 24 killed, 165 wounded, and 25 missing. In addition, Hamblin's brigade lost one killed and six wounded.

Strangely, Warren's narrative remains the conventional account of the February 7 fight. Seminal texts from the post-war era through to recent years disregarded the assault. How ironic, then, that one of the few contemporary images of this Petersburg offensive depicts Crawford's final-day charge. Whatever the circumstances, many Union casualties resulted from the needless assault.

Dr. Nigel Lambert is a retired British academic who lives near Norwich, England. He has published many bioscience and social science articles linked to various medical issues. A life-long Civil War enthusiast, he recently became interested in the battle of Hatcher's Run. Surprised by the sparse and conflicting literature on the battle, he employed his scientific and qualitative research know-how to advance our understanding of the battle. Working with US experts on the Petersburg campaign, he has created an extensive e-library for the battle.