

Union Corps Histories  
3rd Corps

Siege Of Yorktown; Williamsburg; Fair Oaks; Oak Grove; Glendale;  
Malvern Hill; Bristoe Station; Manassas; Chantilly; Fredericksburg;  
Chancellorsville; Gettysburg; Wapping Heights; Kelly's Ford; Mine Run.

The Third Corps included in its organization the famous Kearny Division; also, Hooker's Division, the Excelsior Brigade, the Second Jersey Brigade, and other well known commands. Its brilliant record is closely interwoven with the history of the Virginia campaigns of 1862-63, in which it fought during two eventful years. It was organized March 13, 1862, with Generals Hooker, Hamilton and Fitz John Porter as its three division commanders, and General S. P. Heintzelman in command of the corps. It was immediately ordered to the Peninsula, Hamilton's Division embarking on the 17th, and leading the advance of the Army of the Potomac on that memorable campaign. During the siege of Yorktown the corps was at its maximum, the morning reports of April 30th showing an aggregate of 39,710, with 64 pieces of light artillery, and 34,633 reported as "present for duty." But this aggregate was maintained but for a short time, as Porter's Division was taken away soon after to form part of the newly organized Fifth Corps. Hamilton was relieved on April 30th, and General Philip Kearny took his place, Hamilton going to the Army of the Mississippi, where he was assigned to a division command.

Upon the evacuation of Yorktown, the Third Corps led the pursuit of the retreating enemy, attacking him, May 5th, at Williamsburg, with Hooker's and Kearny's Divisions. This battle was fought almost entirely by the Third Corps; of the 2,239 casualties on that field, 2,002 occurred within its ranks; and three-fourths of them in Hooker's Division, the brunt of the battle having fallen on the Excelsior Brigade and Jersey Brigade, both in Hooker's command. Porter's Division was not engaged, having been left at Yorktown; on May 18th it was permanently detached, leaving only two divisions, Hooker's and Kearny's in the corps, and reducing its aggregate strength to 23,331 present and absent, with 34 pieces of field artillery. The two divisions numbered about 17,000 effectives, out of the 18,205 reported as "present for duty."

At Fair Oaks, its next battle, it lost 209 killed, 945 wounded and 91 missing, principally in Jameson's and Berry's Brigades of Kearny's Division. Five fresh regiments joined in June, increasing its report

of June 20th to 27,474 "present and absent," of whom 18,428 were reported "present for duty, equipped ;" this included eight batteries of light artillery, of 40 guns. After deducting the large number of non-combatants and detailed men which are included in the "present for duty," the corps probably numbered at this time about 17,000 effectives, available in case of action.

The corps made the opening fight in the Seven Days' Battle, at Oak Grove, June 25th, fighting again at Glendale on the 30th, and at Malvern Hill on July 1st; its losses in these engagements aggregated 158 killed, 1,021 wounded, and 794 missing; total, 1,973. The heaviest loss occurred in Robinson's Brigade of Kearny's Division; the First New York, Berry's Brigade, also encountered a hot fire at Glendale.

Upon the withdrawal from the front of Richmond, the Third Corps accompanied the Army of the Potomac to Manassas, where it was sent to reinforce Pope. The corps left Harrison's Bar on August 14th, and marching to Yorktown embarked on the 20th for Alexandria. It arrived at Warrenton Junction on the 26th, and on the following day the Excelsior Brigade had a sharp fight at Bristoe Station. On the 29th, the corps was engaged at Groveton, Grover's Brigade, of Hooker's Division, having a desperate fight at the railroad embankment, in which the use of bayonets and clubbed muskets was officially reported. On the 1st of September, Kearny's Division was engaged at Chantilly, Birney's Brigade taking a prominent part; Kearny was killed in this action. The losses of the corps at Manassas, including Bristoe, Groveton and Chantilly, amounted to 260 killed, 1,525 wounded and 453 missing; total, 2,238. Hooker's Division numbered fully 10,000 men at Yorktown, and received a reinforcement of about 3,000 more; after Manassas, it drew rations at Fairfax Station for only 2,400 men. The arduous nature of its campaigns, as well as the bullets of the enemy, had told sadly on its numbers. The corps was so reduced by its losses that it was ordered into the defenses of Washington to rest and recruit, remaining there during the Maryland campaign, and hence was not present at Antietam.

In November it joined Burnside's Army, then on its way to Fredericksburg, and arriving at Falmouth on the 24th, encamped there until the battle of December 13th. In the meantime, General Hooker had been promoted to the command of the Centre Grand Division, composed of the Third and Fifth Corps; General George Stoneman had been assigned to the command of the Third Corps; General Birney to that of the First Division, vice Kearny killed; General Sickles to the Second Division, vice Hooker promoted; and a third division, under General A. W. Whipple had been added. The corps was not prominently engaged at Fredericksburg, although under a heavy fire;

still, its casualties amounted to 145 killed, 837 wounded and 202 missing; total 1,184, over half of which occurred in Ward's Brigade of Birney's Division. After the battle the corps returned to its quarters at Falmouth, where it spent the winter of 1862- 63. General Sickles was promoted to the command of the corps, and General Hiram Berry to that of Sickles' Division.

On May 1, 1863, the corps broke camp and marched to Chancellorsville, an eventful field in its history; a battle in which the brunt of the fighting fell on the Third and Twelfth corps. It took 17,568 men, including non-combatants, on that campaign, losing 378 killed, 2,634 wounded and 1,090 missing; total 4,102. Generals Berry and Whipple were among the killed.

The depleted ranks were still further lessened by the loss of four New York regiments whose two-years term of enlistment had expired; a nine-months regiment from Pennsylvania had also gone home. The corps was accordingly consolidated into two divisions; the First under General Birney, and the Second under General Andrew A. Humphreys, an able officer who had distinguished himself as a division commander at Fredericksburg.

At Gettysburg, the corps took a prominent part in the battle of the second day, and although forced to fall back from its untenable position on the Emmittsburg Road, it did not do so until it had exacted a fearful price from its assailants. Its losses at Gettysburg were 578 killed, 3,026 wounded, and 606 missing; total, 4,210 out of less than 10,000 actually engaged. The morning report showed 11,924 present for duty equipped. General Sickles was seriously wounded, losing a leg; he left the corps, and General Birney succeeded temporarily to the command. In July, 1863, the corps was increased by the accession of French's Division, which had been in garrison at Harper's Ferry and was composed, mostly, of regiments with comparatively full ranks, although they had been in service several months. General French was assigned to the command of the corps. During the pursuit of Lee, after Gettysburg, a part of the corps was engaged at Wapping Heights, Va., July 23d, an action in which the Excelsior Brigade was prominently engaged. Another minor affair occurred at Kelly's Ford, Va., November 7, 1863, in which some regiments of Birney's (First) Division were under fire.

In the Mine Run campaign a sharp fight took place at Locust Grove, Va., in which Carr's (3d) Division sustained considerable loss, the principal part of the casualties in that campaign occurring in the Third Corps. At this time General French was still in command of the corps, with Generals Birney, Prince and Carr in command of the divisions. Upon the return from Mine Run, the corps went into winter-

quarters at Brandy Station.

On March 23, 1864, the order was issued for the discontinuance of the Third and First Corps. Unjust and ill-advised, it awoke a feeling of indignation and bitter resentment that has never been forgotten by the men. The wearers of the diamond badge gloried in the record of their corps; on all occasions they proudly avowed their connection with it; they considered it second to none, and gazed with pride on the historic names emblazoned on their flags. All this, however, counted for naught at the War Department; the order was enforced, and the war-worn regiments marched away to fight under other banners: the old corps lived only in the story of its deeds that nightly were recounted around the camp-fires of its veterans. The First and Second Divisions were transferred entire to the Second Corps, and, with Generals Birney and Mott in command, became respectively the Third and Fourth Divisions of that corps. The men were allowed to retain the old diamond-shaped, flannel badges on their caps, a prudent concession under the circumstances. The Third Division was transferred entire to the Sixth Corps, where, under command of General Ricketts, it became the Third Division of that corps.

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Source: "Regimental Losses in the American Civil War (1861-1865)" - William F. Fox