

Union Corps Histories - 5th Corps

Hanover Court House; Mechanicsville; Gaines' Mill; Glendale; Malvern Hill; Manassas; Antietam; Shepherdstown Ford; Fredericksburg; Chancellorsville; Gettysburg; Rappahannock Station; Mine Run; Wilderness; Alsop's Farm; Laurel Hill; Spotsylvania; North Anna; Totopotomoy; Bethesda Church; Cold Harbor; Petersburg Assault; Siege Of Petersburg; Weldon Railroad; Poplar Spring Church; Hatcher's Run; Dabney's Mills; Gravelly Run; White Oak Road; Five Forks; Appomattox.

The Fifth Corps was organized May 18, 1862, while the Army of the Potomac, to which it belonged, was engaged on the Peninsular campaign. It was formed by taking Porter's Division away from the Third Corps, and uniting with it Sykes' Division of Regular troops, making a provisional corps of two divisions. This action was confirmed by the War Department, July 22, 1862, whereupon, the term "Fifth Provisional" was dropped, and it became the Fifth Corps, Army of the Potomac. Banks' Corps had been officially designated as the Fifth Corps, in general orders No. 101, March 13, 1862, but the designation does not appear to have been used in connection with Banks' troops. The Fifth Corps of history is the one which wore the Maltese Cross. It was permanently organized, with General Fitz John Porter as the corps commander, and with Generals Morell and Sykes in command of the two divisions.

The first battle of the corps occurred at Hanover Court House, Va., May 27, 1862, an engagement in which Morell's Division stood the brunt of the fighting, and won a creditable victory. On May 31st, the returns showed 17,546 present for duty. On June 14th its ranks were increased by the accession of McCall's Division of Pennsylvania Reserves, 9,500 strong, which served with the Fifth Corps during the Peninsular campaign, but left it upon the return to Washington, the Reserves rejoining McDowell's Corps, from which they had been detached. The battle of Gaines' Mill was fought, almost entirely, by the Fifth Corps and Slocum's Division of the Sixth, the whole under command of General Porter. His troops held their position stoutly, although the attacking forces comprised the entire Confederate Army, with the exception of Magruder's command. At Glendale, the division of Pennsylvania Reserves was hotly engaged, and at Malvern Hill some of Porter's regiments were again in the thickest of the fight. The loss of the corps in the Seven Days Battle was 995 killed, 3,805 wounded, and 2,801 captured or missing; total, 7,601, or half the entire loss of the army. Of these casualties, 6,837 occurred at Gaines' Mill; the remainder at Mechanicsville, Glendale, and Malvern Hill.

The next battle was Manassas (Second Bull Run), where the corps,

still under command of General Porter, did some of the best fighting on that field, the largest regimental loss, in killed and wounded, in Pope's entire Army at that battle, occurring in the Duryeé Zouaves, one of Porter's regiments. The two small divisions of Morell and Sykes sustained a loss there of 331 killed, 1,362 wounded, and 456 missing; a total of 2,151, out of about 6,500 engaged; Griffin's Brigade not being in action.

At Antietam, Porter's Corps was held in reserve; still, it was drawn on freely during the day, so that Sykes' Division was, almost wholly, in action. Soon after this battle a third division was assigned to the corps, taking the place of the Pennsylvania Reserves. This new division was commanded by General Humphreys, and was composed of two brigades; the regiments were all from Pennsylvania and were mostly nine-months men, newly recruited.

General Daniel Butterfield commanded the corps at Fredericksburg, and Generals Griffin, Sykes, and Humphreys the divisions; loss, 206 killed, 1,669 wounded, and 300 missing; total, 2,175. Over half of the loss fell on Humphreys' new recruits, who made a dashing attempt, under his personal leadership, to carry Marye's Heights after all other efforts had failed.

General Meade succeeded Butterfield, and led the corps to Chancellorsville, where it was but partially engaged; loss, 69 killed, 472 wounded, and 159 missing. The time of the nine-months regiments in Humphreys' Division expired soon after Chancellorsville, and that division was necessarily discontinued; but upon the news of Lee's invasion, in 1863, the Pennsylvania Reserves, who were then on duty in Washington, petitioned that they be allowed to march to the defense of their state. Accordingly, two brigades of the Reserves rejoined the Army of the Potomac, and were assigned to the Fifth Corps, in which they again served as the Third Division, this time under command of General S. W. Crawford.

General Meade having been promoted to the command of the Army, just before the battle of Gettysburg, General Sykes succeeded to his place; the divisions were commanded at Gettysburg by Generals Barnes, Ayres, and Crawford. The corps distinguished itself in that battle by its fighting in the wheat-field, and also by the gallant action of Vincent's Brigade in seizing Little Round Top, just in time to save the Army from what might have been a serious disaster. The corps' loss at Gettysburg was 365 killed, 1,611 wounded, and 211 missing; a total of 2,187, out of about 11,000 actually engaged.

The regular troops of the Army of the Potomac were all in the Fifth Corps, Second (Ayres') Division, and at Gettysburg these two

brigades, under Colonels Day and Burbank, again displayed that marked efficiency which, at Gaines' Mill and on other fields, had made them famous, their thinned ranks becoming again sadly depleted under the terrible fire which they encountered. General Sykes remained in command, and handled the corps on the Mine Run campaign; the division generals were Bartlett, Ayres, and Crawford.

In March, 1864, the First Corps was transferred to the Fifth, and General G. K. Warren was assigned to the command. The First and Second Divisions of the Fifth Corps were consolidated, forming the First Division, under General Griffin, while the Third Division--Crawford's Pennsylvania Reserves- remained unchanged; the First Corps had been consolidated into two divisions, prior to the transfer, which now became the Second and Fourth Divisions of the Fifth Corps, under command, respectively, of Generals Robinson and Wadsworth. Under this reorganization, the Fifth Corps contained 67 regiments of infantry, and 9 batteries of light artillery (48 guns), numbering in all 25,695 officers and men "present for duty, equipped."

General Wadsworth was killed in the battle of the Wilderness, and General Robinson was severely wounded, losing a leg at Spotsylvania. General Culture, of the Iron Brigade, succeeded to Wadsworth's command, while Robinson's Division was broken up, and its regiments were distributed to the other three divisions. The losses of the Fifth Corps, at the Wilderness, May 5th and 6th, were 487 killed, 2,817 wounded, and 1,828 missing; total, 5,132. At Spotsylvania, May 8th-13th, it lost 657 killed, 3,448 wounded, and 375 missing; total, 4,480.

During the hard fighting and bloody assaults at Cold Harbor, the Fifth Corps was in line at Bethesda Church, a point on the extreme right, where it was engaged in some sharp actions along the skirmish line, in which it sustained a considerable loss. It also took part in the assaults on Petersburg, June 18, 1864, losing 389 killed, 1,899 wounded, and 38 missing; after which it took its place in the trenches preparatory to the long siege which followed. During the siege it was engaged, August 19th, in the battle at the Weldon Railroad, in which a large number of the men were captured. In this action the divisions were commanded by Griffin, Ayres, and Crawford, these officers remaining in command of their divisions until the close of the war. On October 27th the Corps participated in the first of the battles at Hatcher's Run (Boydton Road), in which it sustained a loss of 279. On February 5th, 1865, it was again engaged at Hatcher's Run (Dabney's Mills), with a loss of 1,319 killed, wounded, and missing.

On March 31, 1865, just before the final campaign, the morning

reports show the corps strength to have been 17,073, "present for duty, equipped." In the closing battles of the war, from March 29th to April 9th, 1865--including Gravelly Run, White Oak Road, and Five Forks--the casualties in the corps aggregated 2,465 in killed, wounded, and missing. Its last battle was fought at Five Forks, in which action the corps, still under Warren, captured 3,244 men, 11 flags, and 1 battery of artillery. The war having ended, the organization was discontinued, June 28, 1865.

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