

## COLONEL RICKETTS

### The Little Cuss Who Commanded Battery Hell

#### WHEN?

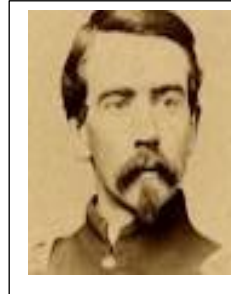
1860S

#### WHERE?

Wyoming Valley

#### EVENT

Ricketts' experience on the Gettysburg battlefield

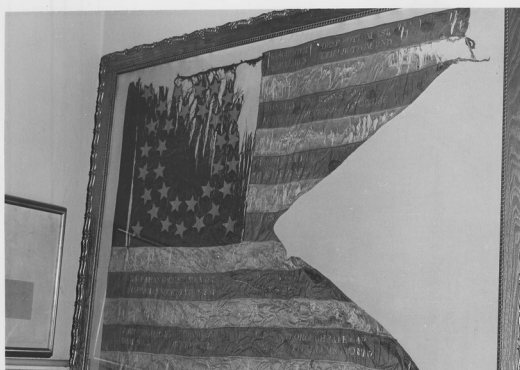


Robert B. Ricketts

#### VOCABULARY

Artillerymen  
Battery  
Mustered  
Handspikes  
Infantry  
Rammers  
Flank  
guidon flag

If you have lived in Northeastern Pennsylvania for very long you have probably heard and perhaps visited Rickett's Glen State Park. It was named for Robert Bruce Ricketts born on April 29, 1839. He grew up in nearby Orangeville, Columbia County, Pennsylvania. After attending Wyoming Seminary for at least one year, he studied law for about four years. It was not long after that the Civil War broke out in 1861. Leaving his studies, the 22-year-old Ricketts enlisted as a private on July 8.<sup>1</sup> By August, he was a first lieutenant. He and his artillery unit played a role in quite a number of battles. The most well-known was Gettysburg. On the second day of the three-day battle, his artillery unit, Battery F, First Pennsylvania Light Artillery, Volunteers, was stationed on top of East Cemetery Hill. (It was mustered into service at Harrisburg, Pa., on August 5, 1861.) A battery consisted of 4 to 6 cannons spaced 10-15 yards apart. Artillerymen had no individual weapons. They relied on support of nearby infantry for protection from the enemy. Attackers knew that if they could kill or wound the artillerymen, then the chances of success for them increased dramatically. Consequently, infantry attacking artillery produced terrible scenes of fighting and losses on both sides.



Rickett's Battery guidon; battles are written in gold on the flag

At dusk on July 2, 1863, (around eight o'clock on the second day of the Gettysburg battle) the Louisiana Tigers, from Early's Division, who reportedly had never lost in battle, attacked the flank of the Union Army. The Confederates were at least 1700 strong. Ricketts position on East Cemetery Hill protected the rear of the Union forces and General Meade's headquarters. If Ricketts' unit was overrun, (he was in an artillery line with batteries on his left and right) the flank would have given way to the Confederates and the battle (possibly the war) would have been lost. The fighting was intense as the Union infantry was pushed back thereby exposing the artillerymen to the Confederates. Wiedrick's battery, on

Ricketts left, was forced to leave the field. This exposed Ricketts left flank and put him in a very dangerous position. In addition, Union troops that were once in reserve in that area had been moved to Little Round Top to support the Union forces there. In wild combat in the darkness where it was difficult to tell friend from foe, Ricketts' battery F and G used pointblank cannon fire. With a cry of "Die

on your own soil boys!" Ricketts' men entered into hand-to-hand fighting using handspikes, rammers, and even rocks. Ricketts remembers the "roar of bullets as they passed over our heads."<sup>2</sup> Control of the battle and the hill hung in the balance. With help from Union infantry sent by General Hancock, Ricketts' outnumbered unit beat back the furious charge of the Tigers thereby protecting the flank of the Union Army. Nearly 1200 out of 1500 of the enemy were killed, wounded, or captured. By holding their position, the Union line remained protected. The unit was also under fire the next day from Confederate cannon, infantry and sharpshooters.

Ricketts served during the entire war participating in eighteen battles. His units were attacked one hundred and thirty-one times. General Winfield Scott Hancock later wrote about Ricketts as "a gallant and distinguished officer, of irreproachable record." Years after the war Ricketts was introduced to a former Confederate soldier who exclaimed "so this is the little cuss who commanded battery hell!"

After the war, then Colonel Robert Bruce Ricketts returned to the area now named for him. His father had purchased 5000 acres around Ganoga Lake in what is today called Red Rock and North Mountain. Ganoga is a Seneca Indian word meaning "Water on the Mountain." It is the highest natural lake east of the Rocky Mountains. He had several business including ice-cutting and lumbering. Ricketts expanded the holdings until they reached some 66,000 acres (over 100 square miles.) A portion of that land is the well-known present day state park of Ricketts Glen. It contains a beautiful set of waterfalls. The highest, Ganoga, is 100 feet. Colonel Ricketts had workmen build the trail and stops along the falls starting in 1889. The work finished in 1893. At the top of the mountain, Colonel Ricketts had a forty-foot steel observation tower built. One could see eleven counties on a clear day. The colonel died from influenza on November 13, 1918 at Ganoga Lake. He is buried along with his wife, the former Elizabeth Reynolds, in a private grave on the property.

#### Check it out online

[Ricketts Glen State Park](#)

[Pa Historical Marker](#)

#### Print Sources

Kashatus, William. *Valley with a Heart*. Luzerne County: Luzerne County Historical Society and Luzerne County Community College. 2012.

#### Endnotes

Kashatus, p. 38

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#### Suggested Activities

1. Using a partner, consider doing an "interview" with Ricketts about his exploits during the battle of Gettysburg.
2. How did Ricketts holdings become a state park?
3. Research the ghost towns of North Mountain. Use: *Ghost Towns of North Mountain: Ricketts, Mountain Springs, and Stull* a book by F. Charles Petrillo.