

### Into The Jaws Of Death: The 26Th North Carolina Smashed The Iron Brigade - And Itself

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## Review

### INTO THE JAWS OF DEATH

#### **The 26th North Carolina smashed the Iron Brigade - and itself**

**Benson, John S.**

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**Gragg, Rod** *Covered with Glory: The 26th North Carolina Infantry at Gettysburg*. HarperCollins Publishers, 2000-07-01. ISBN 60174455

Regimental histories are often lost in an endless sea of Civil War books. Their stories can be similar and pale in popular interest to books addressing topics such as the causes of the Civil War or the lives of famous generals. However, some regiments, by luck or fate, found themselves confronted with glory or destruction and merit special attention if one is to fully understand the battle whose outcome they shaped. The 26th North Carolina was such a regiment.

Concentrating on the regiment's young leader, Colonel Henry King Burwyn, Jr., and several key officers and enlisted men, award-winning author Rod Gragg marches readers alongside the 26th from training, through the War, and onward to the climax at Gettysburg.

The 26th North Carolina was assigned to Brigadier General James Johnston Pettigrew's Brigade in General A.P. Hill's Corps. On July 1, 1863, shortly after the fighting around Gettysburg began, the mostly untested 26th North Carolina collided with the famed Iron Brigade near McPherson's Ridge, shattering the 19th Indiana and 24th Michigan regiments. However, the 26th paid a fearful price. Of the more than 800 men who marched with that unit on July 1st, only 216 escaped the fighting unharmed. Two days later, the survivors helped form the assault on Cemetery Ridge in what is now known as Pickett's Charge. Just 80 would return. In three days of fighting, the 26th North Carolina suffered an 85% casualty rate, the highest of any unit during the War.

Gragg should be commended for his ability to focus attention on the 26th North Carolina's actions while also presenting an overview of the War and the

general movements that led to Gettysburg and its aftermath. Unlike many, Gragg possesses the ability to convey the horror, brutality, and confusion of war. He paints a descriptive picture of the sweltering and bloodstained Pennsylvania fields and the struggle endured by each soldier.

While **Covered With Glory** is the product of extensive research, it is ultimately built upon first-person accounts found in the works of others. Thoughts and perceptions are often presented without footnote, raising the possibility that Gragg has either employed a certain degree of artistic licensing or used footnotes improperly. Structurally the book often suffers from poor paragraph formation and repetitive thought. While factual mistakes are present, they are few in number and do not impact greatly on the book's account of the battle.

In the end, **Covered With Glory** merits attention. Rod Gragg presents an interesting account sure to entertain readers and educate those interested in the Battle of Gettysburg.

*John Benson, an assistant district attorney in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, is vice president of the Bucks County Civil War Roundtable and a participant at the Civil War Institute. He is currently writing an article on the First and Second Delaware regiments at Gettysburg.*