

# Saint Mary's Beacon.

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## Pelham-Breathed Battery.

By H. H. MATTHEWS.

From the Valley  
To Fredericksburg.

PART VII.

Only two days of rest was allowed our battery, when we again had to take the field. The Federals seemed to have the idea that Lee's whole army was in the valley of Va. and in order to ascertain that fact two strong columns of the enemy were sent into the valley at daylight of the 16th of October. These two columns advanced upon us, one from Shepherdstown to Smithfield, under Brig. General A. Humphreys, the other under Brig. General W. S. Hancock from Harper's Ferry to Charlestown. The advance of General Humphreys was opposed by Gen. Stuart in person with Fitz Lee's brigade and Pelham's battery. At Kearneysville, 64 miles from Shepherdstown, Stuart was reinforced by Winder's brigade of infantry, which happened to be at that point engaged in destroying the R. R. At about sunset we attacked the enemy with cavalry, infantry and artillery. We had a stubborn fight, lasting until three, in which we succeeded in driving Humphreys from his stronghold. Every piece of the battery was brought into requisition, in order to keep the Federal batteries from paying too much attention to our cavalry. On the following day Hampton rejoined our command, Gen. Stuart in the meantime covered Humphreys' movements so closely that he did not dare to make an advance. Gen. McClellan having ascertained that Lee was still in the valley, crossed on Oct. 26th below Harper's Ferry with two divisions of infantry and Pleasanton's cavalry, pushing back the Confederate pickets east of the mountains as far as Snicker's Gap. By the 2nd of Nov. all of his army had crossed and advancing into the interior of Va. Stuart being always on the alert, was advised of this movement of McClellan, and while Lee's army was preparing to march, he crossed the mountains into Loudon county by the way of Snickersville with Fitz Lee's brigade and Pelham's entire battery. Major Pelham received his commission about this time as Major of horse artillery, still retaining command of the battery, as Breathed did not receive his commission as Captain until later on. General Fitz Lee having been disabled before the battle of Antietam and Col. W. H. F. Lee being also disabled at Boonsboro, the command of the brigade developed upon Col. W. C. Wickham of the 4th Va. cavalry. The brigade had been reduced to half its numbers, owing to the grease heel that had become an epidemic, consequently the gallant old brigade did not number more than one thousand men. The battery had reduced their number of horses from 6 to a gun to 4. We sent our sick horses and established a horse hospital near Culpeper C. H. in charge of Lt. Feb. On the night of Oct. 30th the brigade encamped at Mountsville, where the Snickersville pike crossed Goose Creek. 7 companies of the 1st Rhode Island cavalry had established a picket post there. Stuart determined to break this nest up. Accordingly on the morning of the 31st, Stuart, with the 9th Va. cavalry under the gallant Lieut. Col. Chambliss, supported by the 3rd Va. under Col. Owens, approached Mountsville by an unfrequented road, surprising the party and capturing their camp and driving the whole party into rapid flight. We captured 50 prisoners, killing and wounding quite a number. The 3rd Va. cavalry continued pursuit as far as Aldie, where it encountered Bayard's brigade of cavalry, consisting of the 1st N. J., 2nd N. Y., 10th N. Y., 1st Pa. and Whiting's Co. of Washington, D. C., and a battery of Single's artillery. A conflict took place between the head of Stuart's cavalry and Bayard's squadron, in which the enemy gave away, retiring to their artillery posted on the hills east of the town of Aldie. Up to this time the battery had not been able to keep up with the cavalry, owing to the rapidity of their movements and the roughness of the ground they had to travel over, but it came up during the earlier part of the engagement at Aldie, more than making up for the few moments they lost in the beginning of this melee. We immediately went into action, and although a superior force of cavalry and artillery oppos-

ed us, Bayard was compelled to retire in the direction of Quantilly, losing a number of wounded and having one of his pieces disabled. We withdrew that night and went into camp near Middletown. While these movements were in progress D. H. Hill's division of infantry had moved through Ashby Gap and was now encamped in the vicinity of Paris Gap and Upperville. On the following morning Stuart's command was disposed so as to cover the front of Hill's. Pickets coming in with the information that the enemy were advancing upon Philmont Stuart, moved through Upperville to him. We met the advance about midway between Union and Philmont, and in the skirmishing that ensued our lines advanced to Philmont. Stuart retired at nightfall, in order to feed his men and horses, but resumed his line of battle the next morning, Nov. 2nd. Stuart had in his front the brigade, consisting of 6 regiments of cavalry, and Doubleday's 2nd brigade of infantry and Pennington's battery of horse artillery, one of the best, if not very best, in the Federal army. We had met this battery on many a hotly contested field of battle. Stuart's force at this time did not exceed 1000 men. I cannot better describe the service of our battery on this occasion, as well as on other fields of battle, than by quoting from that most excellent book entitled "Stuart and his Campaigns", written by that soldier and gentleman "Major H. B. McClellan", Stuart's chief of staff and Asst. Adt. Gen. McClellan says: "The successful resistance which Stuart was enabled to oppose to the Federal advance was in a great measure due to the skillful handling of his artillery. Two spirals more congenial that Stuart and the gallant Pelham never met on the field of battle. Stuart's fondness for the use of artillery was almost excessive; Pelham's skill in its management amounted to genius. Stuart and Pelham imparted to the horse artillery an independency of action and celerity of movement which characterized it to the end of the war, and which was nowhere equalled or imitated. The achievements of the horse artillery are worthy of a separate record and of the careful attention of military men." Leaving the battery in position in front of Philmont, I now take great pleasure in quoting from Gen. Stuart's report of that affair, giving in detail what it would be impossible for me (an humble soldier in the battery) to know: Gen. Stuart states, that "about 8 o'clock a. m., the enemy began to deploy in our front both infantry and cavalry with 10 pieces of artillery. Our dispositions were made to receive them by posting the horse artillery advantageously, and the cavalry dismounted behind the stone fences which were here very numerous, and consequently afforded as good a protection to the enemy as it did to us. Having to watch all of my avenues leading to my rear my effective force was very much diminished, but the Stuart horse artillery under the incomparable Pelham and his able Lieut., Breathed, supported by the cavalry sharpshooters, made a gallant and obstinate resistance, maintaining their ground for the greater part of the day, both suffering heavily, one of our caissons exploding from the enemy's shot. It was during this engagement that Major Pelham conducted one of Breathed's bowitzers,\* some distance beyond our support to a neighboring hill and opened a masked fire upon a body of the enemy's cavalry in the valley below, putting them to flight, capturing their flag, their arms, equipments and horses, as well as some prisoners, sustaining in this extraordinary feat no loss whatever. The enemy finally enveloped our position with his superior numbers, both infantry and cavalry, so as to compel our withdrawal. But every hill top and every foot of ground was disputed so that the enemy made progress of less than a mile during the day. The enemy were held at bay until dark at Leaton's Hill, which they assailed with great determination, but were each time driven back by the murderous fire and well directed shots of the battery, Major Pelham directing one shot himself at the color bearer of an infantry regiment, striking him down at a distance of 800 yards. At night we bivouaced at Upperville. Returning to where I left off, when

introducing Genl. Stuart's most interesting report, I will proceed. In the early morning of the 2nd of November we went into position crossing a plateau below Philmont under the direct fire of the two Federal batteries who the evening before had by constant firing gotten the exact range of our position. Notwithstanding this murderous fire we went into position in a gallop, with nothing to protect us, not a bush or a rock to shield us from the fire of these two batteries. We unflinchingly engaged these batteries. We said there—not a man flinching—but all realizing the great danger they were in. At last after two of our bravest boys C. D. Costigan and John Philips had given up their lives, we were ordered to limber up and get out of there in a gallop, which we did. We, after passing over the ravine, again went into position, causing the Federal batteries to leave the heights of Philmont and come down on the plateau that we had abandoned. In this position the enemy made several attempts to flank us with cavalry and infantry. We were at one time firing on both flanks and in our immediate front. We were being pressed very heavily but not one inch did we move. One of our caissons was exploded at this position by a shell from the enemy's artillery, killing the horses of the caisson, and burning the two men who were at the caisson at the time, Melvin Bollman and John Culbreth. The rapidity with which we were throwing iron into these Federal batteries made it necessary to have two men at the caisson—the limber of the gun being exhausted of its ammunition. A shell exploded in front of my gun (the 2nd) doing considerable damage to the piece, wounding three men. One piece struck me on the left side near the hip bone, bruising me very much, making me very stiff and clumsy for quite a time. I kept up with the piece, however, being assisted on my horse every day by my dear schoolmate, Robert L. Makali, of Georgetown, D. C., the color bearer of the battery. Bob and myself came south together, enlisting in the Beauregard Rifles, a company from Washington commanded by Capt. Frank Schaefer, formerly Capt. of the celebrated National Rifles, of Washington, D. C. This company went to Alexandria, Va., where they organized, and with the balance of the Alexandria troops evacuated the city, May 27th, 1861. On the following day, November 3rd, Pleasanton was reinforced by the 1st cavalry brigade under General Averill, and by Tidball's battery of horse artillery. Stuart received no reinforcements of any kind, except a battery loaned by Genl. D. H. Hill. A reconnaissance made by Capt. W. W. Blackford (engineer officer) disclosed the fact that McClellan's whole army was in motion southward. Stuart instructions were in such a case, to retire along the east side of the mountains, observing and delaying the enemy. Stuart retired to Piedmont that evening. The next morning Pleasanton advanced upon Stuart's new position, being met by Stuart, who was always on the alert. A sharp engagement took place, the artillery being employed actively. It was late in the day before Pleasanton gained Upperville. Stuart, on retiring from the place, sent the 1st, 4th and 5th Va. cavalry on the road to Piedmont, constituting a rear guard for his train, moving his two remaining regiments, the 3rd and 9th Va. cavalry back towards Paris Gap, the battery being with his portion of the command. One of our guns opened on the enemy at long range, the Whitworth gun doing a good deal of damage. This same gun a few days later killed Genl. George W. Bayard while retiring towards Upperville. Col. W. C. Wickham of the 4th Va. cavalry was wounded in the neck by a fragment of a shell. The command now devolved upon Col. Thomas L. Rosser of the 5th Va. cavalry. After Pleasanton had occupied Upperville he showed little disposition to advance upon the gap beyond. Averill's brigade was sent to Piedmont, following the roads pursued by the three regiments that Stuart had sent to that point. Anticipating such a movement, and fearing for the safety of his trains, Stuart sent Rosser with the horse artillery and his remaining two regiments, the 3rd and 9th Va. cavalry, after night by way of Paris to Piedmont. Major B. B. Douglas commanded the 3 regiments which had been sent in the same direction from Upperville. On the evening of the 3rd, Major Douglas had occupied Piedmont, but from

some misunderstanding had retired towards Markham's. On the approach of Averill's division, Rosser and the battery on approaching Piedmont in the night and finding the town in the possession of the enemy, made a detour to Markham's between which place and Manassas gap he found the regiments commanded by Major Douglas. Having reunited his brigade he moved on Markham's and offered battle to Averill. We engaged the enemy for some time, the battery doing their part whenever an occasion presented itself. We expended nearly all of our ammunition. Rosser, after engaging Averill's division and two batteries of artillery, and finding it a useless thing to try and drive a superior force back, withdrew his command from the contest. Stuart was not in command here, being in another part of the field. Gen. G. B. McClellan states in one of his reports "that Averill has sent for assistance at Markham's and reports having had a hard fight with Stuart. I am moving forward to reinforce him." "It would be well to send some infantry here tonight," says Pleasanton, and an hour later he writes, "I have sent Col. Gregg and the 6th cavalry to reinforce Averill at Markham's. Averill sends me word that he had two guns and 300 prisoners at one time and then lost them. I expect he has had a hard time. I have advised him to be very careful." And an hour still later he writes, "Averill's command is, I fear, a good deal crippled. From his report he does not give me his killed and wounded, but tells me one of his squadrons was overwhelmed by superior numbers." Two of our guns were surrounded by Federal cavalry—the Napoleon being especially attacked front and rear—the gallant detachment singing the Marseillaise Hymn while they were fighting their gun with unfaltering courage until relieved from their perilous position by a successful charge of the 5th Va. cavalry. Rosser then retired to Barber's Cross Roads, where he was joined by Stuart and Hampton's brigade of cavalry. On the night of the 4th Stuart thus describes his position: "The crest of the hill immediately north of the town (Markham's) was occupied by our artillery and sharpshooters, with a view to take the enemy's column as it moved up the road; but the main position for defense was just at the cross-roads, where the main body was held in reserve. Towards 9 a. m. the enemy advanced and a fierce engagement took place, artillery coming to the front and engaging the enemy's artillery fiercely, lasting some hours. The enemy approached under cover of ravines and woods and my command held the position near the cross-roads, where our artillery had complete control of the approaches. These cavalry operations lasted several days, from Nov. 2 to 10 inclusive. During that time there was not a day in which we were not heavily engaged from dawn to dark. The conduct of the Southern cavalry was certainly creditable." Gen. Stuart makes no undue claim when he says: "In all these operations I deem it my duty to bear testimony to the gallant and patient endurance of the cavalry, fighting every day in most unequal conflicts, and successfully opposing for an extraordinary period the onward march of McClellan. The Stuart horse artillery comes in for a full share of the praise, and its gallant commander, Major John Pelham, exhibited a skill and courage which I have never seen surpassed. On this occasion I was more than struck with that extraordinary coolness and mastery of the situation which more eminently characterized this youthful officer than any other artillery officer who has attracted my attention. His coup d'oeil was accurate and comprehensive; his choice of ground made with the eye of a military genius, and his dispositions always such in retiring as to render it impossible for the enemy to press us without being severely punished for his temerity." What a grand tribute to the horse artillery and its noble commander. History does not present a parallel. Gen. Stuart's love for his horse artillery and the "incomparable Pelham" was of the noblest character. It almost amounted to idolatry. While Stuart had been operating on the flank of Lee's army in the movements just described the country between Warrenton and Fredericksburg had been occupied by a force of cavalry under Col. J. R. Chambliss of the 13th Va. cavalry, who in addition to his own regiment, appears to have commanded the 15th Va. also, and the 2nd N. C. cavalry. On Nov. 10 the cavalry brigade was reorganized by special orders No. 288. Hampton's brigade consisted of the following regiments of cavalry: 1st S. C., 2nd S. C.; 1st N. C.; Cobb Legion, Ga.,

and Phillip's Ga. Legion. Fitz Lee's the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Va. cavalry. W. H. F. Lee's the 5th, 9th, 10th and 15th Va. and 2nd Va. and 2nd N. C. W. E. Jones, the 6th, 7th, 12th 17th Va. bat-  
talion and 35th Va. battalion of Va. cavalry. Col. T. Munford of the 2nd Va., who had so nobly commanded Robertson's (now Jones') brigade since the 2nd Manassas, was transferred to the brigade of Fitz Lee. Col. W. E. Jones took the Robertson brigade. Col. W. H. F. Lee was promoted to a brigadier. Stuart's command then consisted of 4 brigades of cavalry and 3 batteries of horse artillery. The Pelham battery of 8 guns was divided the latter part of November. Breathed and McGregor were made captains, Breathed taking all the Marylanders and a few Virginians with 4 guns and McGregor 4 guns and men from the extreme Southern States. Hart's 8 C. battery joined us about this time, giving Major Pelham three 4-gun batteries of horse artillery. On the 7th of November McClellan was relieved of the command of the army of the Potomac and Gen. Burnside was appointed in his place. This change gave us a much needed rest, as Burnside was very slow in his movements. The Federal army moved slowly towards the Rappahannock river in front of Fredericksburg. As usual the always vigilant Stuart was in his front despatching his advance. W. H. F. Lee guarded the lower ford on the Rappahannock, while Wade Hampton and Fitz Lee picketed the river above. We were on the move continually, watching the enemy's movements night and day. During this time the battle of Fredericksburg occurred. Dec. 11 to 15 Hampton went on the expedition to Dumfries. Fitz Lee still guarded the ford on the Rappahannock. W. H. F. Lee extended the Confederate right to and as far as Manassas river. To this point of the line Gen. Stuart gave his particular attention. The horse artillery was distributed as follows: Breathed was with W. H. F. Lee; McGregor with Fitz Lee and Hart with Hampton. The artillery camp was on the plank road, about 4 miles from Fredericksburg. Thursday morning we were started by very heavy firing on our left. The fog at this time was very thick. About 9 a. m. the fog lifted and the enemy began to bombard the town from Falmouth hill, using guns of heavy calibre. This annoying continued during the whole day, the horse artillery not being engaged. The next day things were in the same condition. Fitz Lee joined us during the night, having marched from the upper ford, meeting us near Hamilton's Crossing on the Hancock, Fredericksburg and Potomac R. R. The next day we took position near the Bowling Green and Fredericksburg road, on the east side of the R. R. and a little north of the crossing. W. H. F. Lee and Fitz Lee's brigades were drawn up near the crossing. The Whitworth gun was placed farther back on a knoll that commanded the plain in our front. While in this position the fog arose and revealed the enemy advancing in beautiful style, forming lines, planting batteries and so on. Major Pelham, with the Blakey and Napoleon guns of Breathed's battery, had moved forward about a hundred yards in advance of the original position. The enemy came on in dense masses, advancing in a straight line towards us. Pelham, with his two guns, was exactly on their left flank with no support whatever. He opened on them at once causing them to halt, and think of what they were doing. None of the infantry batteries had opened as yet. Pelham alone withstood the cannonading, until he was ordered to retire. We blew up a caisson belonging to one of the enemy's batteries. Genl. R. E. Lee "expressed his warm admiration for Major Pelham's distinguished conduct." John Esten Cooke, in his Surry of Eagle's Nest, describes the death of Jean, a young Creole, a member of the Napoleon detachment. It is beautiful and worth reading. The enemy's heavy guns kept up a constant fire from across the river. Genl. Stuart remained with the battery where he could see plainly the movements of the enemy's cavalry. When the enemy again advanced, Pelham, at a signal from Stuart, threw his two batteries—Breathed and McGregor—into position, to the right of the railroad, opening an enfilading fire on their left flank. The fight began then in earnest. After firing in this position for some time, Pelham was ordered to advance his guns. The fire at this time was terrific—shell after shell burst in our very midst. It seemed to me as one time that the God of Battles would most certainly destroy us. We advanced, sending a murderous fire into their ranks while A. P. Hill's light division hurried them back towards Fredericksburg. Night coming on, we kept our position on the field—Sunday we were up before day. Everything was quiet; the enemy lay in full view and in reach of our guns all day. But not a shot was fired by our batteries. Monday, the same program was carried out. Gen. Stuart, in his report, says: "The gallantry and efficiency of the services rendered by Major John Pelham and his brave Horse Artillery in the battle, have been considered worthy of especial commendation." Gen. B. E. Lee and the great Stonewall Jackson were present together on the extreme right and were witnesses of the unequal contest between Pelham's Napoleon and Blakey and the Federal batteries. Both