



IN THE WILDERNESS.

The Army of the Potomac Moves Toward Richmond.

BUILDING BREASTWORKS.

Expecting Glory and are Compelled to Retreat.

HUMILIATING ENOUGH.

A Stamped and Several Amusing Incidents of the Panic.

Being Chapter XII of Lieut. Kirk's History of the 4th N. Y. H. A., now being published.

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LOOK out, Jim, you'll get hit!"

"Never you mind," replies Jim; "if I'm born to be hung, I shan't be shot here, that's certain."

No matter about the truth or falsity of the theory, fatalism is the most comforting belief a soldier can entertain; since, if his time has not yet come, he can brave any danger with impunity.



We move on a short distance to a point where the trees are larger and the woods more open, and go to work.

Says Dr. W. D. Robinson, who was a member of Co. C: "We were from 150 to 200 feet behind a line of battle, and at the extreme right of the Sixth Corps and the whole army. The line in front of us was engaged in putting up a breastwork. Some of the men were carrying logs for that purpose, and others were throwing the earth up against them. Another squad of men were digging a trench in which to bury the dead, and still another detail were carrying the fallen ones and laying them in their last homes. A portion of us were soon detailed to assist in all of the above duties. It fell to me to help carry several heavy logs and put them on the works, which were not more than two and one-half feet high."

The writer's recollection is that this work was designed for a battery, or for our own protection, but there being no chance of a battery getting into the wood, and the command being without intrenching tools, the work was abandoned.

BULLETS OCCASIONALLY CAME OVER, a moderate skirmish-fire being kept up in front, but as they were not directed at us the casualties for the time we were at work were few, if any.

About 4 o'clock the bullets become more numerous and several of our boys were hit. The provoking feature of our position was that we could not see the source from which this fire proceeded, and we could not fire in the direction whence they came, because there were said to be two lines of our own in front of us. We could not see even these except as men came back wounded and passed to the rear.

Says Dr. Robinson: "As we could see but one line of battle before us, we concluded there was none other. The land before this line was understood to be swampy, so much so that neither army occupied it. Their lines of battle were on each side and at the edge of the swamp. A corduroy road, which was a continuation of the wood road we came up, ran across the swamp. Toward sunset, as it was getting dark early in the woods, we gave up work and returned to our respective places. Some distance in our rear and right was a spring, to which one of our men was allowed to go at a time. Each man would take eight, ten or a dozen canteens, fill them with water and return, when one or two others would go. The front line had their arms stacked, and some of the men had taken off their belts and hung them on the stacks. They began at once like old veterans to cook their supper. Soon their fires were burning.

POPK was FRYING AND COFFEE BOILING when the catastrophe occurred. We of the second line were, many of us, indulging in the luxury of hardtack, raw pork and water."

The number of wounded men retiring from the front seemed to be increasing very rapidly. One man stopped long enough to say:

"You fellows had better dig out of this; you'll get — in a minute."

"Steady, boys; don't fire till you get the order," said the Major.

We couldn't see anything to fire at if we had received the order, unless we fired at some of our own men, who were now coming back in squads and many of them running. The fact was that the lines in front had been stretched out very thin; the front line had either been gobbled or fallen back to the second, and that now was giving way.

Says Stevens, in his "Three Years in the Sixth Corps": "For 36 hours the Sixth Corps, stripped of three brigades of its veteran troops, weary from fighting and fasting, its right unprotected, had been patiently waiting for the relief promised it long ago, and steadily holding its ground until the corps was almost destroyed.

"Thirty-four hours before Gen. Sedgwick had sent word that the rebels were trying to turn our exposed flank, and begged that support might be sent, but no support had come."

In our front, extending a little beyond our right, was Gen. Shaler's (Fourth) Brigade, of the First Division, Sixth Corps; to his left Gen. Seymour's (Second) Brigade, of the Third Division; while Gen. Neill's

(Third) Brigade, of the Second Division, was still farther to the left.

Shortly after 6 o'clock several shells in quick succession came screaming right among us, some bursting overhead and others crashing through the trees, dropping branches and splinters promiscuously. One piece struck a man's hand near the writer, and left a finger dangling. The remark of our friend was verified—

WE WERE GETTING H—L, SURE ENOUGH. I know of no more appropriate use of the word than this. Shell rhymes with and each one certainly sounded like hell that day. So that in view of the uncertainty attached to the use of this term in the Revised Version of the Scriptures, and our experience then and afterward, this use of the word seems fully justifiable and appropriate.

Just then a terrific volley, fortunately aimed a little high, poured in from the right across our flank, followed by an unearthly screaming and yelling. We caught a glimpse of a swarm of gray-coats sweeping out from the right rear, and heard some officer cry, "Men, get back!" and the 1st battalion was for the most part moving to the rear at an astonishing gait.

It was humiliating enough. We had expected to attain glory, and here we were running for our lives, subjected to a fire in the rear and in danger of being captured.

Says Dr. Robinson: "Suddenly out of the dusk in front, on the right, and to the rear of us, burst the Ki-yi Ki-yi close to us, and with it the rebels were seen crossing the breastwork we had put up. The men in front of us were so much surprised they immediately ran, leaving the pork in the pan and the coffee on the fire and their arms. Some of our boys raised up to run, but under command lay down again until the front-line men ran in among us, when we joined them in the stampede."

Says L. J. McVicker, Sergeant-Major of the battalion: "When we took position I hung my haversack and canteen on a dog-wood sapling. The first contained several days' rations of hardtack and salt pork; the latter was filled with water and a handful of coffee and sugar. I had gone to the right of the line

TO WATCH A GAME OF ECHECH between the Major and Adjutant, and when the line of battle ran over us I started full tilt in rear of the line to get my commissary department. As the line was receding, I found myself some 60 feet in rear of my property when the charge occurred. 'Do I want anything to eat?' My eyes and ears were four to one against the answer of my stomach. With a last fond glance at the 'grub' destined to line some hungry Johnny's stomach, I set sail to the rear with all the speed I was capable of."

There was undoubtedly excuse enough for this course, but we were not raw troops and were 500 strong. A large number of the men had seen service, many in two years' regiments and some in foreign wars. The morale of the men was good, and a number regretted afterward that we had not been allowed and directed to charge that battery. That battery, we now know, was supported by Pegram's whole Brigade, which was advancing upon us, while two brigades under Gen. John B. Gordon, his own, and Johnson's Brigade, of Rhode's Division, were moving around our flank, and they captured 600

prisoners, including Gens. Shaler and Seymour.

Gen. Alexander Shaler, in a letter to the writer, says:

"SEYMOUR WAS CAPTURED ON THE LINE; I was captured while rallying the troops a few yards to the left of Seymour's position. Gordon's attack in front, on the flank, and in rear, was simultaneous, and resisted only by a line of skirmishers and a single line of battle without supports."

But Early says in his Memoirs that his own troops were in great confusion, and if we had charged, and succeeded in capturing that battery, we might have turned the tables, though there would undoubtedly have been fewer left to tell the story—

"Of all sad words of tongue or pen the saddest are, 'It might have been!'"

It is but fair to say that some did not leave the breastworks till they had sent a parting salute into the yelling crew approaching.

Says Capt. G. L. Morrison, who commanded Co. M: "Our battalion did not fall back until after the whole front line had passed us going to the rear. Gen. Sedgwick, mounted, was directly behind our line when the first line of the rebels cleared the breastworks some 20 yards in front of us. They were led by an officer mounted on a black horse. This officer, with a leveled pistol, sang out to Gen. Sedgwick, 'Surrender, you, etc., Yankee —!' This rebel officer was killed at once by a shot from one of our battalions, said to have been fired by Sergt. Chamberlain, who died afterward in a Confederate prison, and his horse was with us, ridden by Dr. Lawrence, our battalion Surgeon, during the balance of the campaign."

The writer remembers vividly striking the low branch of a beech tree with his head

the first movement he made, which threw his cap several yards rearward, and that he found another, a newer and better one, a short distance on. As he picked this cap up a shell burst, killing several and blowing the arm of a man who was between him and the missile.

WITH A HEART-RENDING SHRIEK, such as a man can only make whose life is suddenly snatched away from him, the poor fellow dropped to the earth.

Says John H. Maguire, of Co. C: "We had no chance to form, and were carried irresistibly back with the mixed mass. All organization was lost. There was but one road of which we knew, and the stampede centered toward this. The enemy had two pieces of artillery which had complete range of this road. We had no artillery in position. As

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William H. Boughton, of Co. M, says: "Reed L. Brown, George Saunders and myself were together when Gen. Sedgwick came out of the woods. Seizing the colors from a color-bearer he set them into the ground, saying,

"FOR GOD'S SAKE, YOUR COUNTRY'S SAKE, AND MY SAKE, give them a volley! They will run!" Just then the Johnnies fled, coming out from the thicket. We returned the fire, killing several of them. We then advanced, were fired on from the right, and fell back to the road again."

In passing out of the woods that night a good many of the boys were doubtless surprised to hear plaintive voices in the trees calling out, as if reproachfully:

"Fight you will! Fight you will!"

It was near the brooding season of the whip-poor-will, with which those forests abound. But their mournful tones struck our dejected feelings much like the import of the old adage:

"He who fights and runs away Will live to fight another day."

Nevertheless, one man, a member of Co. C, insisted that he heard an order from some one in a tree—"Leap to the rear!"—before he started.

Meanwhile Gen. Sedgwick had ordered Neill's Brigade to the right, Getty's Division having returned from the plank road, and with the fugitives from the Third Division a line was formed through the woods and moved up to a partially-constructed breastwork. This line was composed of a tired and hungry body of troops, who, with bayonets fixed, lay as quiet as death awaiting the onslaught of the enemy. Occasionally some one of our own men approaching in front

WOULD BE HALTED AND COME IN TREMBLING, fearing we were Confederates. Says G. S. Farwell, Quartermaster-Sergeant of the 4th Artillery: "At the intersection of the road that passed by the log house and the turnpike after the stampede, a Lieutenant in charge of two brass pieces came and placed them in the middle of the road, fronting both forks. Gen. Sedgwick came up and ordered A. G. Clark, Sergeant of Co. C, to take what men he could find (there were about a dozen of the battalion together) and form a guard in front of the artillery and not let anyone pass. This force halted every man, officers and all, and made them fall in line in front of us. We had bayonets fixed, and the guns were loaded and layards in place. They kept us there until long after dark, when the battery was ordered to move and we were relieved. The Lieutenant complimented Sergt. Clark for the service he had done. Poor Asa was killed at the second charge at Peam's Station."

Maguire says: "I wandered about in the darkness for some time, anxiously hoping something would happen to direct my course. Suddenly I heard, 'Halt! Who goes there?' I dreaded to answer the challenge, lest it should prove a Confederate. 'Click' goes the lock of a gun, and '—you, speak, or I'll put a hole through you.' I stammered, 'Friend,' and was only too happy to get inside the line of breastworks. I found it was a mixed mass of the Sixth Corps, as many as 20 different regiments being represented at the point where I got in."

About 10 o'clock there was hardly a sound to be heard along the line, when the enemy were discerned through the darkness approaching in force.

EVERY MAN WAS AROUSED AND ON THE ALERT.

The Confederates were advancing cautiously, as if locating our whereabouts. They could hardly have been near enough to discern our slight breastworks, when we heard somewhere down the left the command, "Fire!" and simultaneously a terrible volley was poured into their advancing ranks that sent them flying back.

"Steady, men," came the command; "load your pieces!"

Their advance was evidently a skirmish-line; for half an hour later they came on again silently, till perhaps 30 rods from our position, when with frightful yells they dashed forward.

Another and more terrible volley from our guns, followed by a cheer all along the lines, gave them the coup de grace, and they returned no more.

Says Surgeon Stevens: "Scarcely a man

of the Union force was injured by this charge, but the dead and wounded from the rebel ranks literally covered the ground. There was no help for them. Our men were unable even to take care of their own wounded, which lay scattered through the woods in the rear. So the rebel wounded lay between the two armies, making the night hideous with their groans."

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