

Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac

A Critical History of Operations in Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania from the Commencement to the Close of the War, 1861-1865.

By WILLIAM SWINTON.

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CONFLICTING STRATEGY.

Gen. Johnston Saves Himself by Sending Stonewall Jackson Into the Valley—Alarm at Washington—McClellan's Strange Passivity—Battles of Seven Pines and Fair Oaks.

The brilliant historian of the war in the Spanish Peninsula lays down the maxim that "military operations are so dependent upon accidental circumstances, that, to justify a course, it should always be shown that an unsuccessful course has violated the received maxims and established principles of war."

been based thereon. This event was the junction of Stonewall Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley. The keen-eyed soldier at the head of the main Confederate army, discerning the intended junction between McDowell and McClellan, quickly seized his opportunity, and intrusted the execution of a bold coup to that vigorous Lieutenant who had already made the Valley ring with his exploits.

JACKSON SWEET THE VALLEY. Jackson, on retiring from his last raid in the Shenandoah Valley, which had ended in his repulse by Shields at Winchester (March 27), had retreated up the Valley by way of Harrisonburg, and turning to the Blue Ridge, took up a position between the south fork of the Shenandoah and Swift Run Gap. Here he was retained by Jackson, after the main body of the Confederate army had been drawn in toward Richmond. Jackson was joined by Ewell's Division from Gordonsville on the 30th April, and at the same time he received the

only the reverberations of the guns of the redoubtable Jackson. To head off Jackson, if possible to catch Jackson, seemed now the one important thing; Washington strategists was the preparation of what the President called a "trap" for Jackson—a "trap" for the wily fox who was master of every gap and gorge in the Valley. Now this pretty scheme involved the converging movements of Fremont from the west, and McDowell from the east, upon Strasburg. The two columns moved rapidly; they had almost effected a junction on the 31st; but that very day Jackson, falling back from Harper's Ferry, slipped between the two, and made good his retreat to the Valley, leaving his pursuers to follow in a long and fruitless chase, all the time a day behind him.

JACKSON BEAT FREMONT AND SHIELDS.

The pursuers did their best; they pushed on, Fremont following in the path of Jackson up the Valley of the Shenandoah; while McDowell sent forward Shields's Division by the lateral Luray Valley, with a view to head him off when he should attempt to break through the gaps of the Blue Ridge. Jackson reached Harrisonburg on the 5th of June; Fremont the next day. There Jackson diverged eastward to cross the Shenandoah at Port Republic, the only point where there was a bridge. Shields was moving up the east side of the Valley, close at hand, and might prevent his crossing, or might form a junction with Fremont. Both results were to be prevented. Jackson threw forward his own division, Porter's (June 7), to cover the bridge; and left Ewell's Division five miles back on the road on which Fremont was following—the road from Harrisonburg to Port Republic. Next day Fremont attacked Ewell's five brigades, with the view of turning his right and getting through to the bridge at Port Republic to make a junction with Shields. At the same time Shields attacked the bridge on the east side, to make a junction with Fremont. The result was that Ewell repulsed Fre-

on the left bank. By the 20th, Sumner had constructed two bridges (7) for the passage of his corps; but up to the time when the Confederates commenced the offensive the initiative on the 31st, no provision was made for the crossing of the right wing, and the reinforcement of that wing by the left involved a detour of 22 miles, a distance great for the time, and the possibility of reinforcement in the fierce emergency of battle. Materials for three bridges (8) to be used in the passage of the right wing were immediately ordered, and by the 28th of May (9) these bridges were all ready to be laid. But, meantime, they were not laid, and the two wings were suffered to remain separated by the Chickahominy, and without adequate means of communication.

TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOGRAPHY.

The Chickahominy rises in the highlands northwest of Richmond, and enveloping it on the north and east; empties into the James many miles below that city, and its course describes around it almost the quadrant of a circle. In itself this river does not form any considerable barrier to the advance of an army; but with its accessories it constitutes one of the most formidable military obstacles imaginable. The stream flows through a belt of heavily-timbered swamp. The tops of the trees rise just above the level of the crest of the highlands bordering the bottom, thus perfectly screening from view the bottom-lands and slopes of the highlands on the enemy's side. Through this belt of swampy timber, flows sometimes in a single channel, more frequently divided into several, and when but a foot or two above its summer level, over-spreads the whole swamp. The bottom-lands between the highlands bordering the bottom, in width from three-quarters of a mile to a mile and a quarter, are little elevated at their margin above the swamp, so that a rise of the stream by a few feet covers a great area of these bottom-lands, and even when not overflowed they are spongy and impracticable for cavalry and artillery.

M'CLELLAN AT FAULT.

In this state of facts, McClellan's disposition of his army, as considered a grave fault, and inaction in such a situation was in the highest degree dangerous. "A General," says the Archduke Charles, "must suppose that his opponent will do against him whatever he ought to do." Now, for Johnston to omit to strike one or the other of these exposed wings, was to neglect that principle which forms the whole secret of war—to be sure, not to make any mistake in the collision; it was, in fact, to neglect a unique opportunity of delivering a decisive blow.

The Confederate commander was not the man to let slip such an opportunity; and, as a result of his inaction, he fully developed the position of that portion of the Union army which lay on the Richmond side of the Chickahominy, he determined to act. It was a situation in which, capturing the artillery of his own force to bear against one-third of the Union force, he might hope not merely to defeat but to destroy the exposed wing. By the 30th of May he had formed his resolution, and immediately made preparations for carrying it into effect on the following day. (11) During the night of the 30th, there came a storm of unrelenting violence, and wind and rain, and the rain, in the darkness, the execution of Johnston's proposed plan, at the same time gave that General the hope of making the operation still more complete from the situation in which he found the Union army.

The reconnaissance of the Confederates had disclosed the fact that Casey's Division of Keyes's Corps held an advanced position on the left bank of the Chickahominy, a mile beyond the point known as Seven Pines and about six miles from Richmond. Casey's Division of the same corps was stationed at Seven Pines, on both sides of the Williamsburg road, on the Nine-mile road, his right resting at Fair Oaks Station, on the Richmond and York River Railroad. Of the two divisions of Heintzelman's Corps, that of Kenney was on the Williamsburg road and the railroad, three-quarters of a mile in advance of Savage Station; and that of Hooker was guarding the approaches of the White Oak Swamp.

REBELS ASSAULT.

In this state of facts, Johnston made the following dispositions for attack: Hill (D. H.), who had been covering the Williamsburg and Charles City road, was directed to move his division, supported by the division of the New Bridge, on the Williamsburg road, but not to move till Huger's Division, which was to move out on the Charles City road, should relieve Huger's duty, was to strike the right flank of the Union force which Hill and Longstreet should engage in front. G. W. Smith, with his division, was to advance on the right flank of the Union force to the junction of the New Bridge road with the Nine-mile road, there to be in readiness either to fall on Keyes's right or to cover Longstreet's left. (12) The divisions were to move at daylight; but the wretched condition of the roads, resulting from the storm, greatly retarded the movement of the troops. Hill, Longstreet, and Smith, indeed, were in position by 8 o'clock, but not so Huger. An hour after hour, Longstreet and Hill awaited in vain the signal-gun that was to announce Huger's arrival in his proper position. At length, at 10 o'clock, Hill (13) went forward on the Williamsburg road, (14) and presently struck Casey's

7. Known as "Sumner's Upper Bridge" and "Sumner's Lower Bridge." 8. These bridges were the "New Bridge" and two other bridges, the one half a mile above and the other half a mile below. 9. The divisions were to move at daylight; but the wretched condition of the roads, resulting from the storm, greatly retarded the movement of the troops. Hill, Longstreet, and Smith, indeed, were in position by 8 o'clock, but not so Huger. An hour after hour, Longstreet and Hill awaited in vain the signal-gun that was to announce Huger's arrival in his proper position. At length, at 10 o'clock, Hill (13) went forward on the Williamsburg road, (14) and presently struck Casey's

10. Barnard, Report of Engineer Operations, pp. 18, 19. 11. It is commonly supposed that it was the freshet in the Chickahominy caused by the storm of the night of the 30th, that prompted Gen. Johnston to attack; but he had fully resolved to strike before the storm came on, on the mere chance of the situation of the army. The storm did not come on till the night of the 30th, and the following extract from the official report of Maj.-Gen. D. H. Hill numbers the bridges (6) and the dispositions for the attack as early as noon of that day: "These reconnaissances (of Hill's Brigade command) satisfied me that the enemy was not in force on the Charles City road, and that he had fortified himself about the Seven Pines. The fact was further established, that the whole of Keyes's Corps had crossed the Chickahominy. These facts I communicated to Gen. Johnston about noon on Friday, 30th of May. I received a prompt answer from him that, unless satisfied by my report of the presence of the enemy in force in my immediate front, he had resolved to attack them." Official Reports of Battles, Richmond, 1864.

12. Johnston's Report of Seven Pines: Confederate Reports of Battle, Richmond, 1864. 13. Hill was going under Longstreet's orders into the river. 14. Hill's Report: Official Reports of Battles, Richmond, 1864.

Port Histories of Notable Regiments

By COL. WM. F. FOX.

FIRST MARYLAND INFANTRY.

DENNISON'S BRIGADE—ROBINSON'S DIVISION—FIFTH CORPS.

(1) COL. JOHN R. KENLY; BVT. MAJOR-GEN. (2) COL. NATHAN T. DUSHANE (KILLED). (3) COL. JOHN W. WILSON (KILLED). (4) COL. DAVID L. STANTON; BVT. BRIG. GEN.

Table with columns: COMPANIES, KILLED AND DIED OF WOUNDS (Officers, Men, Total), DIED OF DISEASE, ACCIDENTS, IN PRISON, &c. (Officers, Men, Total), Total Enrollment. Rows include Field and Staff, Company A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, and Totals.

Total of killed and wounded, 429; died in Confederate prisons (previously included), 53. Enrollment includes transfers from Purnell Legion, but none from disbanded regiments after the war had ended.

Table with columns: BATTLES, K. & M. W., BATTLES, K. & M. W. Rows include Front Royal, Va., Wilderness, Va., Spotsylvania, Va., Harris Farm, Va., Shady Grove, Va., Cold Harbor, Va., Picket Line, Va., Petersburg, Va., Weldon Railroad, Va., Poplar Spring Church, Va., Dabney's Mills, Va., White Oak Road, Va., Five Forks, Va.

Present, also, at Maryland Heights; Funkstown, Md.; Haymarket, Va.; North Anna, Va.; Bethesda Church, Va.; Peeble's Farm, Va.; Boynton Road, Va.; Hicksford Raid, Va.; Appomattox, Va.

NOTES.—Mustered into the United States service in May, 1861, for three years. It was stationed at various places in Maryland during the ensuing year, doing guard duty most of the time along the Upper Potomac. In March, 1862, it crossed into Virginia with Banks's troops, and moved up the Shenandoah Valley. The regiment was stationed at Front Royal, Va., where, on May 23, 1862, it was surrounded and cut off by Jackson's rapid advance, and forced to surrender, losing 14 killed, 43 wounded, and 535 captured; Colonel Kenly was seriously wounded. Their gallant opposition retarded Jackson's advance, giving Banks ample time to withdraw in safety from the Valley. The regiment was paroled in September, and two months later it was declared exchanged. In the meantime the small part of the regiment which had escaped capture, together with some recruits, preserved the organization, and was assigned to the Maryland Brigade (First, Fourth, Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Maryland). In March, 1863, this brigade was assigned to Kelly's Division, Eighth Corps, and served in the West Virginia campaign. Upon Lee's invasion, the brigade retired into Maryland, where, on July 10, 1863, it was assigned to the First Corps. In March, 1864, it was transferred to the Fifth Corps. The regiment reentered, and on its return from its veteran furlough the battalion of veterans arrived at the Harris Farm just in time to enter that action, its loss there amounting to 6 killed, 29 wounded, and 2 missing; a heavy percentage of loss as only a small number were engaged. Colonel Dushane was killed at the Weldon Road, and Colonel Wilson fell at Dabney's Mills.

FIFTH KENTUCKY INFANTRY.

HAZEN'S BRIGADE—WOOD'S DIVISION—FOURTH CORPS.

(1) COL. LOVELL H. ROUSSEAU; BVT. MAJOR-GEN. U. S. A. (2) COL. HARVEY M. BUCKLEY. (3) COL. WILLIAM W. BERRY.

Table with columns: COMPANIES, KILLED AND DIED OF WOUNDS (Officers, Men, Total), DIED OF DISEASE, ACCIDENTS, IN PRISON, &c. (Officers, Men, Total), Total Enrollment. Rows include Field and Staff, Company A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, and Totals.

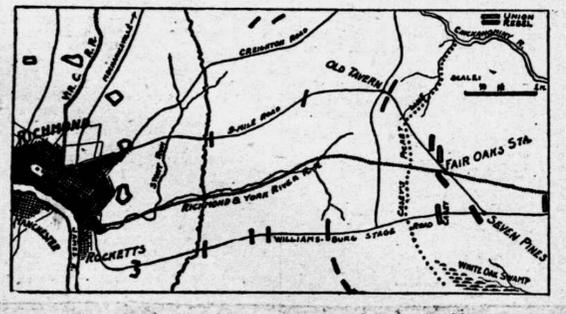
157 killed = 15.3 per cent. Total of killed and wounded, 581; died in Confederate prisons (previously included), 27.

Table with columns: BATTLES, K. & M. W., BATTLES, K. & M. W. Rows include Shiloh, Tenn., Stone's River, Tenn., Liberty Gap, Tenn., Chickamauga, Ga., Brown's Ferry, Tenn., Orchard Knob, Tenn., Missionary Ridge, Tenn., Rocky Face Ridge, Ga., Picket Line, Dalton, Ga., Blain's Cross Roads, Tenn., Resaca, Ga., Dallas, Ga., Kennesaw, Ga., Chatahoochie, Ga., Atlanta, Ga., Guerillas, Place unknown.

Present, also, at Bowling Green, Ky.; Siege of Corinth, Miss.; Adairsville, Ga.; Peach Tree Creek, Ga.; Jonesboro, Ga.; Lovejoy's Station, Ga.

NOTES.—Organized at Camp Joe Holt, Indiana, September 9, 1861, and crossing into Kentucky, soon after, it commenced its active service in Rousseau's Brigade, McCook's Division. In March, 1862, it marched with Buell's Army to re-enforce Grant, arriving on the field of Shiloh in time to take part in the battle and change a defeat into a victory. The Fifth was actively engaged there, losing 7 killed and 56 wounded. After participating next in the Siege of Corinth, it moved with Buell's troops on their long and arduous campaigns, the next battle of the regiment occurring at Stone's River, Tenn., on December 31, 1862. It was then in Baldwin's (3d) Brigade, Johnson's (2d) Division, McCook's Corps; its loss in that engagement was 19 killed, 80 wounded, and 26 missing, out of 320 engaged, a part of the regiment being on detached service. The Fifth suffered its severest loss at Chickamauga, its casualties on that field amounting to 14 killed, 79 wounded, and 32 missing, out of a small number engaged; Major Charles L. Thomassen was killed in this battle. In October, 1863, the regiment became a part of Hazen's (2d) Brigade, Wood's (5d) Division, Fourth Corps, in which command it fought at Missionary Ridge and through the Atlanta campaign of 1864. Though small in numbers, it made a brilliant fight at Orchard Knob and Missionary Ridge, its percentage of loss being again very large; in fact, the total percentage of loss in action of the Fifth Kentucky, as based on its total enrollment, was exceeded by but few regiments in the entire army. The regiment was mustered out September 14, 1864.

EDITORIAL NOTE: The above pages are reproduced from Col. Fox's famous book, "Regimental Losses." Other pages, giving short histories of notable regiments, will appear from week to week. It is hoped the appearance of these short histories will stimulate comrades to send in material for the preparation of more complete histories of their respective regiments than have yet appeared.



THE BATTLE AT FAIR OAKS STATION (SEVEN PINES).

further accession of the two brigades of Gen. Edward Johnson, who had held an independent command in Southwest Virginia. This raised his force to about 15,000 men. Banks's force, reduced by the detachment of Shields's Division, sent to Gen. McDowell, to about 5,000 men, was posted at Harrisonburg. Fremont was at Winchester, across the mountains; but one of his brigades, under Milroy, had burst beyond the limits of the Mountain Department, and seemed to be moving to make a junction with the main body of the army. Jackson thought of advancing on Staunton. Jackson determined to attack these forces in detail. Accordingly, he posted Ewell so as to cover the main body of the army, and himself moved to Staunton. From here he threw forward five brigades, under Gen. Edward Johnson (May 7), to attack Milroy. The latter retreated to his mountain fastness, and took position at a point named McDowell, where, reinforced by the brigade of Schenck, he engaged Johnson, but was forced to retire on Fremont's main body at Staunton. Having thus thrown off Milroy eccentrically from communication with Banks, Jackson returned (May 14) to destroy the force under that officer. But finding this force to be the main body of the Army of the Potomac, he discovered his danger, had retired to Strasburg, followed by Ewell. Jackson therefore followed also, and at New Market he formed a junction with Ewell. Instead of marching direct on Strasburg, however, Jackson diverged on a line to the eastward by way of Luray Valley, and moved on to the north bank of the Shenandoah River, with the view of cutting off Banks's retreat to the Shenandoah, and compelling his surrender. The 23d he entered Front Royal, capturing the garrison of 700 men there under Col. Kenly, and thence he moved to Middletown by a road to the right of the main Valley road, hoping there to cut off Banks. But the latter was too quick for him; so that when he reached Middletown, he struck only the rear of the retreating Union column. Banks, with his small force, offered such resistance as he could to the advance of Jackson, and took position on the heights of Winchester (May 24), where he gave fight, till, being assailed on both flanks, he retired to the north bank of the Potomac river, making a march of 53 miles in 48 hours. Jackson continued the pursuit as far as Halltown, within two miles of Harper's Ferry, where he remained till the 30th, when, Richmond's main force converging on his rear, he began a retrograde movement up the Valley.

UNWISE CHANGE OF PLANS.

The tidings of Jackson's apparition at Winchester on the 24th, and his subsequent advance to Harper's Ferry, fell like a thunderbolt on the war-council at Washington. The order for McDowell's advance from Fredericksburg, to unite with McClellan, was instantly countermanded; and he was directed to put 20,000 men in motion toward the Shenandoah Valley, by the line of the Manassas Gap Railroad. (2) McDowell obeyed, but, to use his own language, "with a heavy heart," for he knew, any man capable of surveying the situation with a soldier's eye must have known, that the movement ordered was not only most futile in itself, but certain to paralyze the operations of the main army and frustrate that campaign against Richmond on the issue of which hung the fortune of war. In vain he pointed out that it was impossible for him either to succeed in his march, or to reach the Shenandoah Valley, as his line of advance from Fredericksburg to Front Royal was much longer than the enemy's line of retreat; that it would take him ten days to reach the Valley, and that by this time the occasion for his services would have passed by. In vain Gen. McClellan urged the real motive of his march, that "always interesting, they were always dying with fear." (4) heard

THE BATTLE OF FAIR OAKS.

It is easy to see the perilous position in which the events just recited placed the Army of the Potomac. The battle of Williamsburg, when the destruction of the Merrimack opened up the James River as a highway to supplies, had transferred his army to that line, it is easy to see that he would have avoided those dangers of the other line whereof the enemy finally took such energetic advantage. I have already set forth the circumstances connected with the advance of the base of the York and the Pamunkey—to wit, the expedition of McDowell's column from Fredericksburg for the purpose of joining the Army of the Potomac—and I have detailed the events whereby that column was prevented from making its anticipated march. Now, it was almost simultaneous with the establishment of the base of the White House that McDowell's column was turned aside from its contemplated cooperation with the Army of the Potomac, and diverted to the Shenandoah Valley. Knowing this fact, Gen. McClellan knew that the hope of further reinforcements was vain and it was incumbent on him to act vigorously with his proper force. He knew that the main body of Jackson's Corps in the Shenandoah Valley neutralized a force of 15,000 men that was certain to be brought against him if he should delay. Besides, he was making an offensive movement in which vigorous action was above all requisite; for when once the offensive has been assumed, it must be sustained to the last extremity, or it will be a mere waste of time. Yet, having reached the Chickahominy, he assumed an almost passive attitude, with his army, too, cut in twain by that sickle and difficult stream.

ARRIVAL OF THE CHICKAHOMINY.

Now, though a position as checked on a river is not one which a General willingly assumes, it is frequently a necessity, and in that case he spans the stream with numerous bridges as workable troops and guns to pass from one side to the other, as if no such feature existed." Gen. McDowell: Memoirs of Warfare and Modern Campaigns, p. 108.

DISPATCH FROM PRESIDENT LINCOLN.

8. Dispatch from President Lincoln: Report on the Conduct of the War, vol. 1, p. 274. 9. This expression of Prince Eugene is used by him in a passage of his Memoirs, descriptive of an event curiously analogous to that to which the above text has reference: "Marlborough," says he, "sent me word that Berwick having reinforced the Duke of Burgundy, the army, which was now about 120,000 strong, marched to the assistance of Lisle. The Deputies from the States-General, always interfering, and always dying with fear, demanded of me a detachment for Lisle to render the States-General safe."—Memoirs of Prince Eugene, p. 108.

1. Nopier: History of the Peninsula, War, vol. 1, p. 8. 2. It should not be forgotten that this was the controlling consideration in the choice by Gen. McClellan of the line of advance by the Pamunkey, instead of swinging his army across to reach the Shenandoah immediately after the battle of Williamsburg and the destruction of the Merrimack immediately thereon—a course the adoption of which would, in all probability, have altered the entire character of the campaign.