

WHEN SOUTHERN ARMS MENACED THE CAPITAL OF THE NATION

The Battle of Fort Stevens the Only Conflict During the Civil War Fought Within the Limits of the District—The Attempt of General Early to Take Washington by Surprise, Met by the Sixth Army Corps, Under General Wright—The Forces of Invaders Repelled.

OUT on the northern border of Washington, near Brightwood, and hard by the Seventh Street Road, are the substantial remains of Fort Stevens. Though practically neglected for thirty-seven years or more, that period of time has not been sufficient to nearly obliterate this memorable earthwork. It is true that it is but one of the series of forts (sixty-eight in number) that environed the seat of government in the old sad days of the old sad fight, and that others may be more picturesque, better preserved, and command more pleasing prospects, but none is so rich in historical interest.

The Only Battle Before the Capital.

Several times during the civil war Washington put in danger, but the only battle, if such it may be called, that was fought within the limits of the District of Columbia, occurred at Fort Stevens, and within its vicinity. Standing by the trees that have grown out of the parapet, or peering through the bosage that seems to be striving to close the embrasures through which well-directed cannon sent shot and shell into the ranks of the invaders, and drove them back, one may look upon the woods from which the Confederate soldiery crept and the fields over which they had the hardihood to advance their pickets to within less than a hundred yards of the fort. All is peace and quiet here now. Birds build their nests in the branches of the trees, or sit on bending boughs of saplings that grow out of the battlements of the fort and sing songs to their listening mates. Not so was it thirty-eight years ago when the scenes enacted here stirred every soul in Washington, from the President and his Cabinet down to the humblest pickaninny, and roused the entire North. The excitement in the National Capital began suddenly, speedily grew into alarm, and alarm, in a very few hours, gave place to absolute consternation.

General Early's Invasion.

On the 9th of July, 1864, almost like a clap of thunder from a clear sky, word came to the Department of War that Confederate General Early had crossed the Potomac at Harper's Ferry, and had fallen upon General Rickett's division of the veterans of the Army of the Potomac at Monocacy Junction and defeated him and Gen. Lew Wallace and his troops and driven them back upon Baltimore. The unquestioned news also came that Early was moving on Washington taking the route by Rockville.

It was soon developed that Lee, relying upon his formidable intrenchments of Richmond and the weakness of the garrisons of Washington, particularly on the north, depended upon to protect the Federal Capital, had sent Early, the boldest, most intrepid and "foxiest" raiders of the two armies, up the Shenandoah Valley by a quite familiar route, drove Sigel's whole force to Maryland Heights, moved through Boonsborough and Fox's and Crompton's Gaps and entered Frederick City. All this was accomplished before it was known to General Grant or the War Department as to where Early was. To add to the alarming feature of the news confirmed word came that the defeat of Wallace and Ricketts was a complete rout and that their forces had left the field in disorder. Again, the most alarming reports were received as to the strength of Early's command and support. General Wallace in announcing the battle of the Monocacy confessed that the behavior of some of his troops was not to be commended, but seems to have been disposed to excuse them on the ground that they were overwhelmed by a superior force. He said, among other things concerning Early's support that "a rebel officer dying on the field today told a staff officer of General Ricketts that Lee was managing these operations in person and would soon have three corps about the Potomac for business against Baltimore and Washington. This circumstance is true, give it what credence you may."

Confederate Cause Desperate.

The cause of the Confederacy was growing desperate and under the circumstances it was believed the Confederates would take desperate chances. With these things in the people's minds, with the knowledge of the defeat of the Union forces; with Early pressing on toward Rockville, almost if not entirely unopposed, and with the belief that the Northern defenses of Washington were so weakened that they could not withstand fairly firm pressure, it is hardly to be wondered at that the Administration and the people became fully alarmed. When Early turned in his course to get on the Seventh Street Pike, then all felt sure that Washington was his objective point and Fort Stevens would be the first point of the defenses to be struck. The writer has it from the best living military authority that it is of record somewhere in the archives of the Department of War that a boat was put in readiness on the Potomac River to convey the President and his Cabinet



Where Lincoln Witnessed the Battle.

Without the Fort as It Appears Today

in case of necessity, to a place of safety down the stream. Such record the writer has, however, not been able to find.

Consternation in Washington.

Certain it is that much confusion and great consternation prevailed in Washington. Mr. Lincoln suggested to General Grant that he retain the hold where he was before Richmond, but that he should bring a force with him personally and make a vigorous effort to destroy the enemy's forces in the vicinity of Washington. However, General Grant, once learning of the whereabouts of Early, of which he was so long ignorant, at once grasped the whole situation, and felt no fear for the safety of Washington and Baltimore. He turned his attention chiefly to the capture of Early before he could retreat across the Potomac. He informed the President that he had sent to Washington a whole corps (the Sixth), commanded by an excellent officer (General Wright), besides 3,000 other troops, and one division of the Nineteenth Corps. These, he thought, would be able to compete with Early. Hunter, he said, would join Wright in the rear of the enemy, with at least 10,000 men. He was anxious to cut off Early's retreat and bag him. This reassured the President, and he never failed in confidence after that. Still, Early was in front of Fort Stevens and adjacent defenses to the north of Washington, and the Sixth Corps had not yet arrived, and a good many agreed with Halleck, when he informed Grant that what he said with respect to getting Hunter in Early's rear was perfectly correct, yet, fearing for the safety of Washington, he added: "But unfortunately, we have no soldiers here for the field."

Preparations for Defense.

On the morning of July 10 Gen. A. D. McCook reported in person at the War Department and was assigned by General Halleck to duty in the vicinity of Fort Stevens, and did the best that could be done in the disposition and assignment of the meager, though efficient, forces in the Northern forts. Fort Stevens was garrisoned with about 300 men. At this time Governor Swan of Maryland was "in a state of mind" concerning the safety of Baltimore, and sent alarming reports and pleas for military aid to the President; but Lincoln, who had become pretty well informed as to the situation, replied to the governor that he had not a soldier that was not



Old Blair Mansion.



Embrasure at Fort Stevens.

being disposed by the military for the best protection of all, and that by the latest accounts the enemy was moving on Washington and not on Baltimore. "They cannot fly to either place," he said. "Let us be vigilant, but keep cool."

It was certain that the enemy was coming down the Seventh Street pike, and that Fort Stevens would be the main point of attack, as had previously been surmised. The "veteran reserves," so-called, constituting the police garrison of Washington, were relieved from guard duty by the clerks of the Quartermaster General's office, and they, with the old soldiers in the hospital and convalescent distribution camps, were hastily organized into provisional regiments, dismounted cavalymen having no horses here were sent into the trenches to act as infantry; and the mechanics, agents, clerks, overseers, and laborers of the Quartermaster's Department who could be detached for a day or two from their ordinary duties were organized and armed and also sent into the trenches. This "heterogeneous" command was for the most part placed under General Meigs, with headquarters at Fort Slocum, the first fort east of Fort Stevens, still further to the east being Fort Totten.

The District Militia at the Front.

Early on Monday morning, July 11, the entire militia (eight regiments) of the District of Columbia was called out and sent to "the front." Before noon the enemy's pickets commenced the attack on the 150th Ohio Regiment, forming the picket line in front of Forts Stevens and Slocum (among which, by the way, were Senator Hanna and Governor Nash of Ohio), and drove them back. The enemy's skirmish line continued to advance until it was within less than a hundred yards of the fort, but to the right of the Seventh Street road. They held their ground for a while, but were driven back by shells from Forts Stevens and Slocum. Meanwhile, President Lincoln, who had been out at Fort Stevens and thereabout drove to the Seventh Street wharf to meet the first divisions of the Sixth Corps under the immediate command of General Wheaton, which departed at noon, and marched to Fort Stevens arriving there about 4 o'clock. The skirmishers at Fort Stevens had been able, with the aid of shelling from the forts to hold the enemy well in check; and from personal sources the writer has it that the Twenty-fifth New York Cavalry, forming a part of the picket line, dis-

Scenes of the Battlefield Where the Confederate Army Attempted to Enter the City—Met by the Federal Troops—President Lincoln a Spectator During the Exchange of Shot and Shell—The Part of the District Militia in Repulsing the Enemy Under Their First Fire.

tinguished itself perhaps beyond what it is given credit in the records thus far forming the history of this battle.

In the evening on the 11th the Confederate pickets made their appearance again in force in front of Fort Stevens, pressing the hard-worked Union pickets back. At 5 o'clock Gen. Wheaton marched outside the fort and trenches, deploying his whole brigade and relieving our pickets. He drove the enemy back 300 yards from the fort. The night set in under these circumstances, the Confederate pickets seeking lodgement in the various houses, barns, shops, clumps of forest trees, etc.,

Headquarters of Confederate Generals.

Generals Early and Breckenridge occupied the old Francis P. Blair house and some of the other Confederate generals the James Blair house. The former house was the general headquarters of the Confederates, and it was here that they held high revel on the nights of the 10th and 11th. They cleared the cellars of the houses of all of the wines, liquors, preserves, etc., and dispatched them as only those skilled in the art could dispose of them. They also turned things topsy turvy in the old Blair mansion, and ransacked and scattered all papers that could be found.

At dawn on the morning of Tuesday, the 12th, the lines of rebel skirmishers could be seen from the parapet of Fort Stevens, and the enemy's pickets and sharpshooters opened fire from all of the houses in front of Fort Stevens, where they seemed to be massed. Fort Stevens opened early on the enemy, directing the first shots at Carbery's house, 1,078 yards distant, then at the Rives house. Fort Slocum opened with shell, also directing its fire to the houses and other buildings and places affording lodgment and shield to the sharpshooters and pickets of the enemy. Postmaster General Blair's and a number of other houses were burned in these actions. Skirmishing was kept up all of the forenoon of Tuesday by the advance of the Sixth Corps of veterans.

General Wright in Command.

At noon on July 12 General Grant gave orders, through General Halleck, assigning Major General Wright to supreme command of all troops moving out against the enemy, and gave instructions that he should get outside the trenches with all of the force he possibly could and push Early to the last moment. At this time the entire Sixth Corps had reached Washington and two divisions of the Nineteenth Corps came in next day. While the enemy were well supplied with cannon, not a single shot was fired at the forts or upon our picket lines. Several attempts were made to plant batteries, but they were abandoned. But one casualty occurred in the fort, a surgeon being slightly wounded in Fort Stevens. It should not be neglected to be mentioned that Fort De Russy rendered very efficient service throughout those engagements, over 100 shots being fired therefrom.

At 5 o'clock in the evening of July 12 General Wright ordered General Wheaton to move against the Confederate skirmish line and drive it back, and this he did by a most brilliant movement. The forts opened fire, and as had been previously arranged, after the thirty-sixth shot from Fort Stevens had been fired, a signal was made from the parapet of that work and the commander of the skirmish line and three assaulting regiments dashed forward, surprising and hotly engaging the enemy, and drove them until dark. The whole attack was gallant and successful, the last shot being fired about 10 o'clock. The balance of the night was occupied in burying the dead and caring for the wounded.

President Lincoln on the Scene.

Meanwhile President Lincoln visited Fort Stevens, under an escort of cavalry, and stood for a while on the parapet witnessing the fight. At the entreaty of General Wright he stepped down and took position behind the parapet, afterward moving off toward the west, along the line of forts.

During the night of the 12th Early hurriedly left, moving toward the focus of the Potomac, abandoning his wounded in the hospital tents and under clumps of trees. General Vincent tells of finding many Confederate wounded on the 13th in a most pitiable condition, all of whom were cared for as best they could be.

Early could not have made an assault upon the forts of Washington before the late evening of the 11th or the morning of the 12th, and then it was too late. The "Old Sixth" Corps was here, besides other efficient soldiery.

There is a bill now before Congress to preserve Fort Stevens for a park, and for the sake of history, to perpetuate it as a mark of the only battle fought within the District of Columbia.

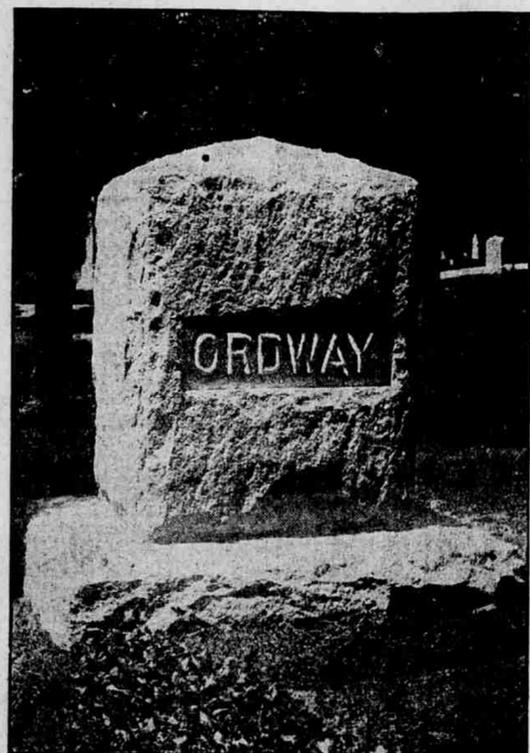
SERVICES OF GENERAL ORDWAY TO THE NATIONAL GUARD OF THE DISTRICT COMMEMORATED IN STONE AT ARLINGTON

AFTER many delays the monument erected over the remains of the late Brig. Gen. Albert Ordway in the national cemetery at Arlington was unveiled with simple but appropriate ceremonies during the past summer. Invitations to be present were extended to all contributors to the monument fund and to all officers of the District of Columbia National Guard, as well as to a number of officials. The military personages in attendance wore their fatigue uniform with side arms.

General Ordway was the first commander of the District of Columbia Militia, as at present organized. The monument bears the following inscription: "Albert Ordway—Born February 24, 1843; Died November 21, 1897. Brevet Brigadier General of U. S. Volunteers, 1865. Brigadier General Commanding District of Columbia Militia, 1887-1897. This monument was erected by officers and enlisted men of the District of Columbia National Guard, in loving recognition of soldierly ability and unselfish manliness of the highest and most uncommon character."

General Ordway during the civil war was attached to the Department of North Carolina, Army of the James, and the Department of the South, Army of the Potomac. He entered the service as a private in the Fourth Battalion, Massachusetts militia, April 19, 1861, and was commissioned first lieutenant, Twenty-fourth Massachusetts Infantry, September 2, 1861. He was in the engagements at Roanoke Island, Newburn, Tranter's Creek, with the Tarboro expedition, was at Kinston, Whitehall, and Goldsboro.

General Ordway served as aide-de-camp to General Prince, headquarters Fifth Division, Eighteenth Army Corps, during the engagement at Little Washington, and was aide-de-camp at headquarters Second Division, Third Army Corps, Army of the Potomac, at Wap-



The Ordway Monument.

ping Heights. He was ordnance officer, headquarters First Division, Tenth Army Corps, under General Terry at Richmond and Petersburg Railroad, Drury's Bluff and Weir Bottom Church.

General Ordway was promoted to captain June 1, 1864; to major September 24, 1864; to lieutenant colonel November 15, 1864, and to provost marshal general, Department of Virginia, with rank of colonel, May 1, 1865. He was brevetted brigadier general, United States Volunteers, March 13, 1865, for highly meritorious services during the war, and was mustered out with honor February 10, 1866. The deceased was commissioned brigadier general, District of Columbia Militia, April 19, 1887.

The monument is of Vermont granite. Attached is a bronze tablet. In a niche will be placed the following data: Name of General Ordway and his military history; date and place of birth; date and place of death; copy of order issued by

the District of Columbia Militia announcing his death; copy of order parading the District of Columbia National Guard for funeral ceremonies; unmounted photograph of deceased; clipping from Washington newspapers announcing his death; clipping from newspaper containing picture of the monument; list of officers of the District of Columbia National Guard published January, 1902.

The monument was erected through the efforts of the Gen. Albert Ordway Memorial Association, which collected the necessary funds. The officers of the association are: Brig. Gen. George H. Harlee, honorary president; vice presidents, Brig. Gen. Cecil Clay, Col. M. E. Urell, Col. Henry May, Lieut. Col. Oscar F. Long, Lieut. Col. Theodore Mosher, Lieut. Col. R. A. O'Brien, Lieut. Col. R. B. Ross, Commander Robert P. Hains, Major E. H. Neumeyer, president; Major H. H. Parmenter, treasurer; Capt. C. Fred Cook, financial secretary; Lieut. Charles G. Mortimer, and Lieut. P. W. Smith, corresponding secretaries.

THE GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC

Never an army like that, ne'er such men as they,
Ne'er a title so grand, or cause so great,
And never a victor so ennobled the way—
We'll find ne'er their mate, and bless'd be their fate!
For the grandest of all we can boast of today
Are the matchless men of the G. A. R.,
As they march 'neath the flags that they brought from the fray;
Their story is written in ev'ry star!

Through many a battle they've carried "Old Glory!"
But one by one they are falling away;
Still proudly they carry their heads white and hoary—
(Number their ranks on Memorial Day.)
Let us treasure them dearer, and honor them more.

For they made possible all we possess;
The Republic will know no such heroes e'er more,
Bravely their country to hold and to bless!

We'll have patriots and heroes till the end of Time,
And many a triumph to tell in reunion;
But none will outlive us in story sublime.
Like the brave men who fought for the Union,
Long may they live and ever in sculpture and song
Their names be told, as their deeds no renown'd—
(These incomparable Vet'rans that to us belong),
And all at last in Heaven be crown'd!
—Jennie Porter Pardee.