

THURSDAY MORNING, JUNE 20, 1861.

Battle of Great Bethel.

Incidents of the March from Camp Butler—The appearance and feelings of the Vt. troops—The blunder at the "cross roads"—Instances of Personal Daring and Bravery—Full account of the Engagement at Great Bethel, &c.

[Correspondence of the Daily Herald.]

Camp Butler, Newport News, }
Virginia, June 10, 1861. }

5 o'clock, P. M.

We have just returned from the battle field of the "Cross roads," and "Bethel church," and closed a march, including counter-marches of not less than thirty miles. I hasten to lay the facts and incidents of the two battles before those having friends in the Vermont Regiment, supposing that many painful apprehensions will be entertained as to the safety of our men.

It must not be supposed that I am able to state with accuracy all the details, either of the plan, or execution; but of such incidents as came under my personal observation, I will attempt to give a faithful picture.

On Sunday evening, at dress parade, five companies of the 1st Regiment, including the Bradford, Northfield, Woodstock, Burlington and Rutland companies were detailed to be ready for a secret expedition, to leave camp at midnight, at which time those companies with full ranks, (except those on guard and the sick) fell into line. It turned out that an intended attack was to be made upon two camps of Rebels, about two or three miles apart, and said to be about eight miles distant from this place; and that the force was to be composed of the portion above named, of the Vermont Regiment, five companies of the Mass. 4th Regt., "Clarks Rifles," one company in advance, with the N. Y. Regt., Steuben Volunteers, as a reserve, with a twelve pound field piece in their rear, and two field pieces of flying artillery, under the charge of the regulars. Lieut. Grebble, commanding the Artillery.

Lieut. Col. Washburn, of the Vt. Regt., and Major Whittemore, of the Mass 4th Regt. commanding the detachment from this post, to be supported by Col. Duryea's Zouaves, and Col. Townsends Regt. from camp, near Fortress Monroe,—the whole under the command of Gen. Pierce.

When we fell into line, we were ordered to take along our haversacks with hard bread, enough for breakfast, and water in our canteens, which by the way are wholly unfit for the use intended, as they are made of rubber cloth, and it is impossible to cleanse them of the nauseating taste of the material of which they are composed. The attack was intended to be made in the night, and we were to distinguish friends from foes by using the signal of the word "Boston." We took up our line of march at twelve—the column moving forward silently. Clarks Rifles in advance of the Vt. Regt., Mass. 4th, artillery and Steuben volunteers in the above order.

of the day as it apprised the rebels of our approach and enabled them to put both divisions of their forces together and obtain reinforcements. As soon as the fact in the case became known, the line of march for Bethel church was formed in the following order: Col. Duryea's Zouaves led Townsend's Albany regiment, Clark's Rifles, one company; Vermont and Massachusetts troops Artillery and the Steuben Volunteers.

It was hot, sultry, dusty, and the men were thirsty. They had nothing but a little hard bread to eat and no time to eat that except on the march, but the soldiers without a murmur plodded on with the steady tramp, tramp.

An incident occurred when our part of the line was about two miles from the battle field which I cannot fail to mention. As we passed a mansion, a beautiful woman, a perfect type of a southern beauty, stepped forward through the shrubbery and stood at the front gate beneath the shade of a Mulberry tree.—She was evidently deeply agitated, the flush was on her cheek, but her demeanor was calm. One of our officers was asking her some questions as we passed, evidently in relation to the situation of the rebels before us, and her face was a picture of contending emotions, between the natural frankness of her nature, the cunning adroitness of her mind and the deep interest which she felt for some friend, perhaps brother or husband who was in the rebel camp. No wonder that spectacle brought a tear to the begrimed face of many a dusty soldier.

We made the march with one or two short halts and came up to the enemy at about half past nine o'clock, in as unfit a condition for a battle as hungry, thirsty, tired men could be.

The field was an open space, including a large corn field directly in front and an orchard with high grass and bushes beyond the corn field in which the rebels were drawn up in line. On either side of this space were woods heavily timbered, so that it was impossible to flank them with artillery or infantry in column, or to take any position in the rear. The line was formed by Col. Duryea's Zouaves on the right, Col. Townsend's Regt on the left of the front line—the Steuben Volunteers on the right, and Vermont and Mass. troops, on the left of the second line. Our line was not formed when the rebels opened upon us from a heavy battery. The Zouaves at once threw skirmishers into the woods on the right, and Capt. Ripley was ordered to take the Rutland and Burlington companies and advance into the woods on the left as skirmishers and to hold the woods against any flank movement by the rebels. We had but just got into line when the advance movement was commenced and our line advanced through the woods at the same time the two lines moved upon the enemy in the open field. The column in two lines moved through the open space in fine style and in good order, under a heavy fire of artillery which proved to be from batteries containing ten cannon, and some of them rifled guns. The Zouaves made a charge, after the rebel troops had retreated into their fortified works. Col. Townsends' regiment made a charge as soon as they

The distance proved to be much further than we supposed, and we were on a sandy, dusty road—practically without water, as the stagnant pools on either side of the road were unfit to taste, and we could not stop at the wells of the few houses we passed to drink. It seems impossible that so large a column of men could be moved with so little noise. It was only a dull sound like the wind in the distant forest, as the tramp, tramp of the men fell into the sandy roads broken occasionally by the click of a bayonet against its fellow, as some soldier would slump in the dust deeper than usual, and reel against his comrade. It was impressive to hear the whispered commands of the officers, and oft they were—distinctly heard. It proved to be the dead march in a manner that adds peculiar sadness to the misadventure which among the men is called the battle of the "Cross Roads."

The column had arrived within a short distance of where, we expected to find the first encampment of rebels, with the exception of the reserve or Steuben Volunteers. They are Germans, and had halted at the cross roads two miles in our rear, and brought their cannon to the front. Just at that moment, Col. Townsend's Albany regiment came up under the command of General Pierce, and neither regiment expecting to form a junction at that point with any portion of the force, both regiments mutually mistook each other for enemies, and in an instant, fire was opened on both sides.

The roar of artillery and hundreds of muskets, just at early twilight, apprised us as we supposed, that we had been outflanked and the enemy had engaged our reserves in the rear. An instant countermand and "double quick" every step of the way, soon brought us back over the two miles we had just passed to the cross roads. It was still too dark to distinguish uniforms at a distance. The Albany regiment had taken position on some high ground beyond a large open field and among buildings and trees.

The Vermont and Massachusetts men were deployed into the open field in front and formed in line—but before the line was formed, a shell was thrown at us from the buildings which fell short of the line several rods. They commenced breaking down the board fences to open the way for a charge. Col. Washburn rode along the line and said, "When they come, give them one volley and the cold steel at double quick." We gave the signal, "Boston," and were answered but could not distinguish the reply. Major Whittemore of the Massachusetts 4th, with great coolness and presence of mind rode forward upon a white horse and went clear up to the buildings to ascertain the true character of the troops. It was a brave act and ought to entitle him to the first rank as a man of personal courage. At this moment Capt. Ripley was ordered to take three companies on the right of the line including the Massachusetts 8th, the Rutland and Burlington companies, and deploy to the right, into a thick undergrowth of pine to cut off a flank or rear movement upon us in that quarter and to hold the road through the woods. The captain moved his command rapidly but in perfect order to the position indicated—detailed ten men from each company to cut down the bushes immediately in front of us and awaited the result.

As it came on perfectly light and with further investigation the sad truth dawned upon us, that battle had been waged between our friends—but owing to the darkness the mortality was not great, there being but four killed and seven wounded.

Col. Duryea's Zouaves came up at this stage of affairs having been diverted from the attack on "Bethel Church" in the same way that our division had been deceived by a supposed attack in the rear.

The battle of the cross roads lasted about 40 minutes and proved the great misfortune

reached the works and there the Vermont and Massachusetts men and the Steuben Volunteers charged again but it was in vain. The position was too strong to be carried by assault from such a force inside.

The position instead of being a simple camp with less than a thousand men as we supposed, proved to be strongly fortified, with heavy guns, a strong embarkment and deep ditch and held by a force variously estimated at from 1800 to 5000 men. Our men charged upon the works until the ammunition for the cannon was expended except four shots which had to be saved to cover the field on the retreat—and stood under a fire of musketry which providentially was high, but which more resembled the steady roll of thunder than reports of single guns. The batteries paid the Rutland and Burlington companies the compliment of the special attention with grape and canister and rifled balls. It was "God's Mercy" that we were not cut to pieces, for the balls and shell flew like hail stone among the trees and yet strange to say not a man was killed or hurt in either company. I saw a ball strike a tree by the side of James Everson's head and supposed him shot dead but the fellow sprang up and took cover behind a large tree. Sergeant Lamson dodged just in time and only just in time to save his head. Many other similar hair breadth escapes occurred. Lieut. Grebble commander of the artillery was shot through the head while at his guns by a rifle cannon shot which killed two other men at the time. He was in the regular service, was an amiable man, a perfect gentleman and a true soldier. He had been with us at our camp here and the men had become attached to him. He served his guns with accuracy and effect, and was shot in attempting to cover the retreat. His sergeant lashed his body upon the limber of the gun and brought it from the field.

The loss I cannot speak of with any accuracy as a thousand rumors are floating, but it is lightest in our regiment and heaviest among the Zouaves.

One company of Zouaves lost ten and their loss must be heavy as they were round a murderous fire well served. I saw our Zouave Captain brought from the field in an ambulance, wounded in the thigh. He was pale and bleeding but saw his surgeon on a horse and requested to be put on it. The surgeon advised him not to attempt to mount but he sprang from his ambulance and with little assistance, mounted the horse—grasped the bridle reins with his left hand and drawing his sword with his right waived it with a look of exultation above his head in the sun light, and called out in a voice of thunder but with an expression of exquisite pain "Zouaves—Company eight—fall in" and rode away at the head of his men,—the blood dropping at every step of the horse. I do not know his name, but know him to be brave and hope him a speedy recovery. The Zouave practice is efficient on the field.—

The Zouaves fell when a volley was delivered at them and at once rose and fired. Single Zouaves would creep along on his belly and pick the artillery men from their guns. It was more unpleasant to see the men leading off the wounded than to see the bringing away of the dead.

Our Reg't was formed in line to cover the retreat on the same ground where it was first formed while we were in line a couple of Zouaves came from the field supporting a wounded comrade by each arm. It was the type of fidelity and bravery both, to see them expose themselves, under the guns of the rebel battery, across that whole field, to save a wounded brother in arms. The loss of the enemy must have been much greater than ours, as our men poured a deadly fire into their works when the charges were made. Many were seen to fall, and when a head came by the parapet was always a fair

get of a score of sharp-shooters. I presume you will have strange rumors and stories of the battle. It was neither a victory nor defeat. It was a simple repulse. We were deceived in the distance, the position and the number we were to oppose. The misadventure at the cross-roads gave them the advantage of reinforcements and preparation, and when it became evident that it would cost too much life to carry the works, it was prudently resolved to fall back, as we were without ammunition for the cannon, and await till a better planned expedition should give us heavier artillery. We came into camp simply because we had nothing to eat or drink, and no place to sleep, short of here. The Quarter Master sent to us when about two miles from camp, a barrel of bread, do of whiskey and some herrings. They were acceptable. It is no boast, but the plain truth, to say that our troops acted with just coolness and courage,—they obeyed orders, which is the highest praise that can be bestowed upon the common soldier. Colonel Washburn was with his men in the hottest of the fight, and the Vermont and Massachusetts men were gallantly led by him on the right and Major Whittemore on the left.

Col. Townsend led his Regiment to the charge on horseback, while the air was a network of balls. The regulars pay him high compliments.

It is said that the rebels have evacuated their position at Bethel Church, not daring to await our return,—but of this rumor, as of others, I give them as they are passing at this hour, without vouching at all for their truth.

It is true we did not accomplish the object we attempted, but we fought a hard battle, and under the circumstances performed a terrible march; but our men who have returned are in good spirits, and send their compliments to their friends at home.—The Light Guard are all in.

I must apologize for writing so much more than I intended, but I felt it a duty to place before our friends as soon as possible, the material facts connected with the fortunes of the day.

W. T. NICHOLS.