

I could not, with every exertion, get forward with the troops earlier than we did. I wished to go to Centerville the second day, which would have taken us there on the 17th, and enabled us, so far as they were concerned, to go into action on the 19th instead of the 21st; but when I went forward from Fairfax Court House, beyond Germantown, to urge them forward, I was told it was impossible for the men to march forward. They had only come from Vienna, about 6 miles. And it was not more than 63 miles farther to Centerville—in all a march of 124 miles; but the men were foot-weary, not so much, I was told, by the distance caused, as by the time they had been on foot, and the slow pace we had to move to avoid ambushes. The men were, moreover, unaccustomed to marching, their bodies not in condition for that kind of work, and not used to carrying even the load of light marching order.

We crossed Bull Run with about 18,000 men of all arms, the 6th division (Miles' and Richardson's brigade) on the left, at Blackburn's ford to Centerville, and Schenck's brigade, of Tyler's division, on the left of the road, near the stone bridge, not participating in the main action.

The numbers opposed to us have been variously estimated. I may safely say, and avoid even the appearance of exaggeration, that the enemy brought up all he could, which were not kept engaged elsewhere. He had notice of our coming on the 17th, and had from that time until the 21st to bring up whatever he had. It is known that in estimating the force to go against Manassas, I engaged not to have to do with the enemy's forces under Johnston, then kept in check in the valley by Maj. Gen. Patterson, or those kept engaged by Maj. Gen. Butler; and I know that every effort was made by the General-in-chief that this should be done, and that even if Johnston joined Beauregard, it would not be because he could be followed by Gen. Patterson, but from causes not necessary for me to refer to, if I knew them all.

This was not done, and the enemy was free to assemble from every direction, in numbers only limited by the amount of the railroad rolling stock and his supply of provisions. To the forces, therefore, we drove in from Fairfax Court House, Fairfax Station, Germantown and Centerville and those under Beauregard at Manassas, must be added those under Johnston from Winchester, and those brought up by Davis from Richmond to other places at the South, to which is to be added the levy en masse, ordered by the Richmond authorities, which was ordered to assemble at Manassas. What all this amounted to, I cannot say—certainly much more than we attacked them with.

I could not, as I have said, more early push on factor, nor could I delay. A large and the best part of my forces were three months' volunteers whose term of service was about to expire, but who were sent forward as having long enough to serve for the purpose of the expedition. On the eve of battle the Fourth Pennsylvania regiment of volunteers, and the battery of volunteer artillery of the New York Eighth militia, whose term of service expired, insisted on their discharge. I wrote to the regiment, expressing a request for them to remain a short time, and the Hon. Secretary of War, who was at the time on the ground, tried to induce the battery to remain at least 5 days. But in vain. They insisted on their discharge that night. It was granted; and the next morning, when the army moved forward into battle, these troops moved to the rear to the sound of the enemy's cannon.

In the next few days, day by day, I should have lost ten thousand of the best armed, drilled, officered and disciplined troops in the army. In other words, every day which added to the strength of the enemy made us weaker.

In conclusion, I desire to say, in reference to the events of the 21st ult., that the general order for the battle to which I referred was, with slight modifications, literally conforming to that the corps were brought over Bull Run in the manner proposed, and put into action as before arranged, and that up to late in the afternoon every movement ordered was carrying us successfully to the object we had proposed before starting—that of getting to the railroad leading from Manassas to the valley of Virginia, and going on it far enough to break up and destroy the communication and interviews between the forces under Beauregard and those under Johnston. And could we have fought a day or a few hours sooner, there is everything to show how we could have continued successful, even against the odds with which we contended.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your most obedient servant,

IRWIN McDOWELL,

Big Gen. Commanding.

[Our Army Correspondence.]

FROM THE THIRD REGIMENT.

CAMP LYON, Chain Bridge, }  
Washington, Aug. 5, 1861. }

Editors of the Free Press: I see by the numbers of your paper which you have been so kind as to send me, that you get many items respecting our regiment and position from different quarters, some of which are true and others are wholly baseless. I do not wonder that this should happen, as in almost every instance they are idle rumors, whose origin nobody can trace, but which spring into being with every fear or surmise of every soldier in camp. I shall endeavor in whatever I write you, to state what I know or have good reason to believe.

You may have learned that Col. Smith has been placed in command of the forces stationed at this point, consisting at present of the Maine 6th, and an artillery and cavalry company, besides our own regiment. Other regiments will soon be stationed here—among them the 2d Vermont.

This point is obviously a very important one. The "Chain Bridge" which gives name to the place, is a thing of the past. The bridge which now stands in its place is a substantial arched bridge—passing over not only the river, but the whole low valley, between the high bluffs on either side. This bridge is now so defended, that the rebels will not be likely to attack it, though at Fall's Church, seven miles distant, and at Vienna, eleven miles distant, they have large forces.

There is greater danger of an attack by a force fording the River above and coming down on this side. To prepare for such a possible attack a battery is now in process of construction on the hill back of the camp, which, with heavy guns, will command a wide extent of territory on both sides of the river.

Another circumstance which adds importance to this location is the fact that it commands the reservoir from which Washington draws its principal supply of water. This reservoir lies a few rods above us, bisected by the boundary line of the district. Could the rebels gain this point, Washington would easily fall into their hands. They are well aware of this, and may, in their present state of assurance, make the attack; to succeed will be another thing.

Our pickets brought in this morning four professedly Union men, and a "contraband," all fleeing in dismay. They report the rebels are scouring the country impressing forage, provisions, horses and men indiscriminately. Two of the men have been discharged, what will be done with the contraband is not yet determined. I hope he will be allowed his freedom.

Capt. Seaver of the Hartford Co., has been appointed Provost Marshal of this vicinity, and in that capacity has been very active in breaking up rum-selling establishments. The Colonel is bent on breaking up drunkenness. He condemned four men to march four hours out of six for twenty-four hours, a day or two ago. The lesson has been very salutary.

Aug. 6. Movements in camp have been very stirring last night and this morning, indicating the apprehension of an immediate attack.—An extra picket went up the river at a late hour last night, and this morning a still larger force has moved in the same direction, partly as guard and partly as workmen to prepare means of defence. The force on our fortification here is to be doubled. Hardly enough for guard will be left in camp. M. P.

FROM THE 2D VT. REGIMENT.

IN CAMP AT BUSH HILL, FAIRFAX CO., VA., }  
August 5th, 1861. }

Editors of the Free Press: I notice that some reports have gone to Burlington concerning the "Vermont Guard" not quite in accordance with truth. For instance, the Times of July 26th says:—"Lieut. Sharpley carried the company into the battle and brought it off, showing throughout the contest the utmost coolness and self-possession. A cannon shot struck exactly at his feet on one occasion, plowing the earth and knocking him senseless; but on rising, he went in again. He was ably seconded by Lieut. Weed." I do not wish to detract in the least from the merits of Lieut. Sharpley. He has gained the reputation of being a brave

and efficient officer, and he has the best wishes of all under his command. But as for his leading the company through the battle, I hardly think that Mr. Shaw (from whom the information purports to come) will admit that any member reported such a fact to him; nor will Lieut. Sharpley desire the reputation of so doing. Lieut. Sharpley did take command of the company when Capt. Drew became too exhausted to proceed farther, and led the company until rendered senseless by the cannon ball, when he was carried from the field by privates Meriam and J. S. Spaulding, and was not seen again by the company until it reached Centerville. Lieut. Weed took command after the misfortune to Lieut. S., and to him is due the credit of taking the company into battle and bringing it off, showing throughout all the coolness and self-possession ascribed to Lieut. Sharpley. He, certainly, was ably seconded by Orderly Bain. It would be unjust to Lieut. Weed not to give him the honor which he deserves. Lieut. W. is now in command of the company, and not a 1st Lieutenant of another company, as another report says.

We are recruiting up now, and are occupied mostly on guard duty. We have now two companies each day for guard—one for a picket guard, and the other as a guard about the camp. Since Gen. McClellan has taken command, we have been kept very close, only two being allowed out of camp at a time, and then only with a written pass. Officers and men are debarred from the pleasure of going to Washington. On this account, intoxicating drinks have almost disappeared from camp. This produces a very beneficial effect upon the health of the men. We have but few in the hospital now.

Yesterday was a very sad day with us, rendered so by the death of Corporal Huntley of the Waterbury company. His disease was diphtheria. Appropriate and very solemn exercises were held, and the corpse was started on its homeward journey. To-day we are called to mourn another brother soldier—private Dow, from the same company, who died of the same disease. Thus have four of our number been laid low by this terrible disease. There are several others in the hospital suffering from diphtheria, but none which are considered dangerous. The bodies of these young men have been sent home to their friends by the members of the company.

Company G. has five men in the hospital at present; Sergeant Stuart and E. K. Sibley are in the camp hospital. The former was not wounded as you reported, but was sick with the measles at Centerville upon the day of the battle. By almost superhuman exertions he succeeded in walking to Alexandria, and has since been very weak. Sibley is down with the fever but is not considered dangerously ill. Nelson is wounded in the hospital at Washington, while we hear that Corporal Wilcox and private Bates are very badly off in the hospital at Annapolis; with these exceptions the company are enjoying good health.

Our regiment has not yet commenced work upon the entrenchments but we are employed rather as an advanced guard. Our pickets occasionally get a sight at those of the enemy, but no skirmishing of importance has occurred, nor do we anticipate any forward movement for some time to come. Indeed we are in no condition for such a move as we have half a dozen different kinds of guns and have but one shirt and one pair of socks apiece so that when washing day comes we are in a bad fix. Our fare is not much improved, but the boys stand up under all these difficulties much better than could be expected. How long they will live with the miserable rations with which we are supplied is more than I can tell; yet we are promised better rations sometime, perhaps when we get back to Vermont. By the way there has been much excitement in camp for a few days past owing to the rumor, that we cannot be held out of the state more than three months, and that we shall then go home for the purpose of recruiting up. I think the boys are not homesick at all, nor are they discouraged, but they wouldn't object to a short furlough.

All our grumbling about our guns bids fair to cease, as we have intelligence to-day from Mr. Hatch that he expects to procure rifled muskets for us. Gen. Davis and Lieut. Gov. Underwood, visited our camp to-day, undoubtedly for the purpose of finishing our equipment.

We have heard to-day that we are to move to the neighborhood of the 3d regiment, in a few days. At any rate you must not expect us to move to Vermont until Jeff. Davis and his rebel crew are no where. W.

GEN. PIERCE ON THE BATTLE OF BIG BETHEL.

It will be remembered that Brigadier Gen. E. W. Pierce, of the Massachusetts Militia, commanded the detachment which made the night attack on Great Bethel, in June last. The failure to capture the place was attributed at first pretty generally to the inexperience and inefficiency of Gen. Pierce. There were many however, who, from the first reports of the transaction, believed the expedition badly planned, and that General Butler should bear a good share of the discredit, which at first was thrown exclusively on Gen. Pierce.

Gen. Pierce having fulfilled the term of service for which he was sent, and returned to civil life, has published in the Boston papers, a statement intended to free himself from the blame, unjustly, as he thinks, imputed to him. The main part of that statement is the following:

On the 9th of June I received orders from Gen. Butler, and accompanying them a plan for an expedition to rout a force of the enemy stationed at Big Bethel. The particular regiment to proceed from Hampton to make the attack was designated in the order. Upon inquiring as to what rebel force there was there, I was told by the commanding General that he had ordered the proper reconnaissance to be made, and had ascertained that there was at that point about 500 of the enemy. Relying upon this, and in obedience to the order of the commanding General, I proceeded on the night of June 9th, to the attack on Big Bethel. It was by his order that I took new recruits, who had never been under fire, and who had hardly been in camp a month, and contrary to all the established rules of warfare, to march at midnight 12 miles into the country, without one moment's rest, and with only 20 rounds of cartridge, to make an attack upon an enemy of unknown numbers, and as we found, strongly entrenched in masked batteries.

It was by the order of the commanding General that I was provided with only two small howitzers and one six-pounder, with only 12 rounds of cartridges—hardly sufficient for 5 minutes fire—to attack a masked battery of at least six well-mounted cannon.

It was by the direction of the commanding General that every man in the detachment which went from Camp Hamilton wore on his left arm a white badge; that, as the attack was to be made in the night, or the grey of the morning, and by detachments from two different camps, no accident might occur; and it was to the neglect on the part of him who ordered the expedition and arranged the plan to notify the detachment from Newport News of that badge, that I attribute the most lamentable occurrence of that day—the collision of friends in the morning. Indeed I have since learned that the white badges were seen on our arms by those who first fired upon us, but alas! for them they had no significance.

The orders given me in regard to the attack were explicit, yet they betray a want of knowledge of the enemy's position and numbers. Had the opportunity been afforded me to have made a reconnaissance myself, I am confident that the defeat, at least, would not have occurred. And yet, with all these inadequate preparations, I think, had the enemy's right and centre been as vigorously assaulted by the New York troops as was their left by the Massachusetts and Vermont, we might, at least, have entered the battery, though perhaps only to have been driven out; for it must be recollected that Big Bethel is much easier of access from Yorktown, the rendezvous at that time of 12,000 secession troops, than from Fortress Monroe.

It was not until the Third and Fifth New York regiments had been completely demoralized, and utterly incompetent from exhaustion to continue