

Providence Journal  
July 27, 1861  
2 Letters from the 2d R.I.

Correspondence of the Journal.  
The Reverse.

CAMP SPRAGUE, July 24.

After our brigade had been withdrawn to the woods, arms were stacked, and the men sat down to take some refreshments from their haversacks, and compare notes with regard to the battle. I took this opportunity to traverse the scene of conflict. Our own men had been carried off, but in the corn-field I found numbers of the enemy dead or dying. After rendering what assistance we could, I conversed with some not so severely wounded. They belonged to New Orleans and Alabama regiments, and stated that their Colonel was mortally wounded. They said that all that morning troops had been coming as rapidly as possible from Manassas, by rail and on foot; that their force was very strong, though they had no means of ascertaining the numbers; that Beauregard held command in person; and that we should find the batteries very formidable. They seemed grateful for any kindness, and said they were now convinced that we were neither brutes nor cowards, as we had been represented to them. One poor fellow, shot through the hip, begged us to send home the body of his Lieutenant, lying near, as he was "of a wealthy family, who would pay any amount for the service."

Returning up the hill I found one of the 71st leaning mournfully over the body of a comrade. "Look here!" said he, "that is my chum—we have slept under the same blanket for three months." I will not describe the sights and sounds of horror which greeted me whichever way I turned. I have seen one battle field—may no stern necessity ever compel me to see another.

Stationing myself upon the summit of the hill, I watched the progress of the conflict, the heat of which was now removed nearly a mile to the east. The 69th New York, the Fire Zouaves and several other fresh regiments were now ordered forward, crossed the hollow, and commenced ascending the opposite hill. Up to this time I think all the shot had come from one battery, which the Zouaves were ordered to storm, Capt. Reynolds meanwhile keeping up a persistent fire upon it. The brave fellows rushed at it on the double quick, and twice, I am told, they gained possession of it, but each time were repulsed by overwhelming numbers, and at the same time two or three new batteries opened fire upon them from the covert of the adjacent woods, making sad havoc in their ranks. Hardly had they recovered from this surprise, when the famous "Black Horse Cavalry" charged upon them, firing their revolvers. In their ranks they bore a small Union flag, by reason of which they were allowed to approach very near, the Colonel of the Zouaves crying out, "Don't fire, boys! they are our own cavalry!" Can treachery more devilish and double dyed be conceived of than this, twice practiced on that day? When the Zouaves discovered the deceit, they poured in a destructive fire which emptied many saddles and sent the horsemen flying back into the forest. Thus far I had watched the varying fight, but the enemy's batteries now began to play upon the infantry who were forming in the hollow, doing them but little harm, their aim being much too high, but dropping shot and shell in my vicinity quite too thickly to be pleasant; so securing a ball from a rifled cannon which ploughed up the earth near by, I retired to the piece of woods where our regiments were in waiting.

THE RETREAT.

We had perhaps been here half an hour, when there was an energetic call from some one, I think Gov. Sprague, "Rhode Island, stand to your arms! Our troops are falling back on us!" and presently emerged from a cloud of dust half a dozen ammunition wagons, driving furiously, followed by a confused crowd of soldiers of different regiments, walking and running, crying out as they passed, "Save yourselves, boys! we are whipped, and the enemy is close behind us!" There was some delay in forming our men, caused, not by fear, but actually by the men hunting over the stacks to get the muskets with their own particular number on it. We were marched a short distance, and halted in a field, while Col. Burnside rode back to reconnoitre. Meanwhile, in three or four different streams the fugitives were pouring by us from the battle field, exhausted and dispirited. After a while the Colonel came back and told us to go to the brook half a mile back and fill our canteens, which we did in perfect order. All this I supposed to be preparatory to a rally by our regiments and the 71st, and a return to the

battle field. But I presume Col. Burnside, Gen. McDowell became convinced that no effort would avail with some of the regiments who had been brought into the field on the run for four miles, without water, and were quite used up. When, therefore, our canteens were filled, we were told to march on. Then, for the first time, the appalling truth burst upon me that we were defeated, and had nothing left for us but a mortifying and painful retreat. We kept together very well for six miles, till coming upon an open plain, two musket shots sounded ominously in the wood to our left. In three minutes more artillery was heard on the main road, which we were now approaching again, and the iron missiles came singing over our heads and crashing through the trees. The column hurried into the woods, and I think none were killed at this point. But a few hundred yards brought us into the road leading to the bridge, which we had passed in the morning. As we crowded towards it the enemy's artillery was plainly visible on a hill to the west, supported by cavalry, while the crowded masses in the road made a target which they could hardly miss.

THE FLIGHT.

A discharge of musketry from an ambuscade in the bushes completed our confusion, and the retreat became a complete rout, everybody struggling to gain the bridge. But when on reaching it we found it barricaded, and our own artillery piled up pell mell, with wheels broken and horses gone, our ambulances filled with wounded drawn up to the side of the road, their occupants resigning themselves to their fate, the enemy's guns sending round shot and shells, crashing and tearing through the panic-stricken crowd all the while, our misery was complete. I do not think a man of us really expected to escape.

Some climbed over the barricade. Most, like myself, dashed through the river, waist deep. Many fell down, losing their arms in the water. When we got through, our clothes were so weighed down with water that we could with difficulty climb up the farther bank. One poor fellow near me lost his shoes, and walked twenty miles in his stocking feet. When we got clear of the stream we scattered into the woods to escape the deadly storm of balls, and after another mile could breathe freer. It was dark when we reached Centreville, but we kept on to our old camp, when we flung ourselves upon the ground, hoping to rest awhile. But there was no rest for us. We had hardly begun to dry ourselves by the fires hastily kindled, when the word was passed: "Fall in, boys, we must march to Washington!" twenty miles more. We staggered into the road again, and recommenced our weary march.

I have no very definite idea of the subsequent events of that dismal night. We stumbled along through the hours of darkness, gradually becoming scattered, as the strong ones outwalked the weak, eagerly dipping our canteens in the muddy pools through which the cavalry and wagons had passed, welcoming the drizzling rain which came towards daylight, watching the dull sunrise over the endless road, till at last the blue haze of the Potomac, seen through half shut eyelids, revived us a little, and somehow or other, I shall never be able exactly to tell how, most of us got inside Fort Ranyon, on the Arlington side of Long Bridge. Here we were detained an hour or two, and treated to breakfast, and a wash. After this the regiments were reformed, and marched over the bridge to camp. A sorry show we made, passing through the city, with feet that finched from every stone, and a sad assemblage watched us from the windows and sidewalks. A fat Irish woman looked at us a moment as we passed, then stuck her knuckles in her eyes and blabbered outright.

Ever since we got here, stragglers have been coming in, and some now missing may yet appear. Our loss is not large. You will have the official report before this reaches you. Of the causes of our defeat, I say nothing. It becomes us to be grateful to the merciful Providence that saved so many of us, through that day and night of horror. It takes the stories of several different men to make the true story of a battle. You have mine. One word more. All that we won that day,

and all that we did not lose, that is, our lives, we owe, under God, to Col. Burnside. D. W.

From the files of  
John Hennessy

The following is an extract from a private letter of Lieut. Shaw, Company F, 2d regiment:

CAMP CLARK, July 22, 1861.

Here I am safe and sound. We started from our camp, just beyond Fairfax C. H., at half-past one a. m. for Bull Run, and marched about 15 miles, going round instead of taking a direct road, so as to get the other side of the enemy. We arrived there about 9½ a. m. Sunday, and the first intimation we had of their whereabouts was a discharge of musketry, although we had a company of skirmishers on each side of the road. Our company was the advance guard, and the instant we were fired upon, Col. Hunter gave our company the order to "advance, company front, and let them have it." Their position was in a thick wood of about 500 feet in depth, beyond which was a large open lot slightly ascending, and just beyond that was a deep valley with a high hill and masked battery. As soon as we received their fire, we returned it, and fell flat on our faces to reload; while loading they gave us another volley, which passed over our heads. We then arose again and drove them (500 in number) over the hill. As we were advancing they fired again, but fired too high. Reloading, we ran to the top of the hill and let them have it again, and believe that every shot dropped one man. They then retreated to their battery, firing as they went, 10,000 more firing at us over their heads, one of the shots striking Capt. Tower in the throat and killing him almost instantly. The only words he spoke afterwards were, "Turn me over on my back—go in." We then had it hot and heavy for about ten minutes, with the assistance of the two companies which were deployed as skirmishers, at which time our regiment joined us. In about fifteen minutes afterwards the 1st came in, and together we fought them 1½ hours, without other assistance, and drove them from their battery to the woods, mowing them down as they retreated, with a considerable loss on our side. At that time a division made its appearance on our right and blazed away at them, making great havoc among them, and driving them from the woods back to their battery, (the reason of their leaving it in the first place was that our light battery exploded their magazine.) By this time our troops had arrived to the amount of 20,000, including the regulars, and to every appearance our victory was complete, and we had orders from our Colonel (Burnside) to go into the wood and rest ourselves and take care of the wounded.

Those of our troops who have been in engagements before say that it was the hardest battle they ever witnessed, and that they never saw any troops stand fire as well as ours.

In my last I wrote you that I had a lame foot, occasioned by blistering it, wearing the blister oil and taking cold in it. I walked all the way to the battle ground with a cane, and threw it away when the firing commenced, then walked back to camp and half way to Washington, when I got a horse without a saddle and rode to Long Bridge.

July 26, 1861

20 Rhode Island

## LETTERS FROM THE SECOND RHODE ISLAND REGIMENT.

CAMP CLARK, July 23, 1861.

To the Editors of the Evening Press:—Dear Sir

Among the vast crowd of facts and thoughts I hardly know what to say that will be of the greatest relief to your readers. The Regiment is now mostly together again, and getting quietly settled in their quarters. Rations, blankets, &c., have been served out, and every possible thing will be done at once to make the men comfortable. New and spacious quarters are provided, where the wounded will at once be placed and carefully attended to.

The roll of the companies has just been called, and the result is as follows: 28 killed, 66 wounded, and 30 missing. Total 116. This is even more favorable than I feared when I wrote last evening, and we trust that the missing ones will all return to us and that nearly if not all the wounded ones will recover.

Among the lost I include Col. Slocum, Major Ballou, and Captains Tower, and Smith. Of Col. Slocum, I have spoken already. The whole camp mourns for him. His absence fills all with gloom, and has made the whole day seem to us like a funeral ceremony. 'Tis not the loss of a skillful officer alone, that many of us mourn, but a warm-hearted and faithful personal friend whose place we see no means of filling. Major Ballou, also, showed himself among the bravest of the brave. He was constantly in the thickest of the fight, cheering the men by his voice and by his example, to yet greater valor. Even after he fell, he continued to shout to the men to press onward. He was as we know, a gentleman of most amiable character and high culture, and has now crowned his distinguished life, by a heroic fall. He was yet alive when the army retreated, but no hope was entertained by Dr. Wheaton that he could survive. Captain Tower, fell early in the battle, while boldly leading his men to the charge. He merely requested to be turned over, and died without a struggle. Captain Smith, after having led his company bravely through the strife, and performed all the duties of a gallant officer, was instantly killed by a ball from the masked battery which fired upon us on our retreat. To see him and others, thus literally mowed down in their defenceless condition, and to witness the rushing together of guns, wagons, carriages, horses and property of all sorts, into masses of hopeless confusion and ruin, was to me the most terrible part of the whole affair.

The standard bearer of the regiment, John M. Durfee, who escaped unhurt, is deserving of special mention and praise. Though the balls were showering upon him like hail stones, and though the colors which the ladies presented to us was completely riddled by them, he not only bore it proudly aloft in the face of the foe, but waved it fearlessly far in advance and called constantly to the men to follow and defend it. An officer of another regiment shouted to me in his admiration—"That fellow alone is worth a thousand men!" Doubtless the steadiness of the men and the entire success of this part of the conflict are very much to be attributed to his bearing. It is no small part of the credit of the well disciplined and bravely led company of Capt. Viall that they furnished to us such a standard bearer.

But time and space would fail me to go into particulars. You may rest assured that the reputation of the State has been well sustained and that the high praise which is bestowed by all upon the 21 regiment has been richly earned. Had the decided advantage gained by them been followed up by others with one half their promptness and valor, our defeat would have turned out a glorious victory. I am surprised to notice with what intelligence the men now discuss the incidents and the management of the combat. Also, with what vigor they are now recommending the work of preparation for renewed conflict. Do not imagine that there is the least discouragement here. We have only sowed the dragon's teeth, and armed hosts are springing up like magic. The returned regiments with often all but trifling losses will soon be reorganized. A vastly larger army is already gathering about us, and when, with more experience, able general officers and better discipline, it shall again take the offensive, woe to them upon whom shall fall its pent up vengeance.

I will only add that our men are rapidly regaining their strength and cheerfulness. The wounded (including Freeman) are doing well, and let our friends and all who mourn remember that their loved ones have fallen nobly and in the cause of freedom. In this and in the grace of God may they find consolation.

Yours, &amp;c., TOCKWOTTON.

From the files of  
John Hennessy