Letter from the Third Maine Regiment.

CLEMONT PLACE, HEADQUARTERS 3D
Mr. Reg.
Alexandria, July 29th, 1861.

Mr. Editor:—I presume your many readers are anxious to learn of our welfare after the ill-fated battle at Manassas.

We left here on the 16th (as I presumed in my last) at one o'clock, P.M. The brigade, under command of Col. Howard, marched until one o'clock at night, and then halted four miles in the rear of Fairfax Court house, to cut off the retreat of the rebels, who, when attacked by the command of Gen. McDowell, much to our sorrow the "birds had flown." The next morning we started with the whole brigade for Fairfax Station, where some eight thousand of the rebels were in stand. We had marched some three hours when we found our way blocked by trees fallen across the road to hinder our advance. These obstacles were soon cleared away. After a delay of one hour, we resumed our march and arrived at the station just one hour too late. Again we were doomed to disappointment; the rebels had left in confusion, leaving camp stores, &c. We camped down for the night, but not until we had cooked our supper in the same utensils that the rebels had cooked their dinners in. We remained until late in the next afternoon, and then started for Centreville some six miles, which had been taken by our troops that day just before the defeat of Gen. Tyler.

Arriving at Centreville at 10 o'clock, we camped down in a field. At this place we remained two days. Here the grand army of Gen. McDowell was made up. On Sunday morning, 21st, at 3 o'clock, we moved in column of forty-five thousand infantry, one thousand cavalry, and sixty-five field pieces, in the direction of Manassas Junction. Parts of the division passed on the left and commenced moving some in Boll's Run battery, from which the rebels retreated in direction of Manassas. Our brigade halted some six miles from Manassas to cut off our retreat. We remained two hours and then marched in direction of Manassas, at which place our artillery had been storming a battery some hours.

We arrived on the field of battle about 4 o'clock, and when we marched on, some of the regiments that had retired from the field, who called to us as we passed, "go on, boys, the rebels are retreating," with which we passed on still stronger running. The position of the slope at the height of our speed, nor did any seem daunted at the sight that met our eyes as we came in full view of the field. Even the shambles of the cannon balls seemed to impart new courage to the now exhausted famos.

Our brigade, while in the open field, was exposed to the crossfire of two batteries which were concealed in the wood, as also were their infantry. Our men rushed on to the edge of the wood, exposed to the ball and shell of both batteries, and made their discharges of musketry into the wood, in the direction of the enemy's fire.

The cannonading on our side had nearly ceased when we went on the field; and why our brigade was pushed so far out of line by the wood and shell, without any artillery on our side, is more than I can say. We had been on the field but a short time ere our batteries commenced moving from the field, and then the infantry were alone to withstand the charge of their cavalry, as ours had left us to cover the retreating rebels.
The rebels did not choose to make the change until the order had come to retreat; then the Black Horse cavalry of Jeff. Davis & Co. made a grand charge upon the Maine boys and some other regiments on the field. At this moment a cannon on the hill in front gave them a dose of grape, at which they concluded to retire. The rebels sent shell and balls after us without effect. A perfect panic seemed to prevail in the whole army, and in one confused mass they moved on, exposed to a cross fire of the enemy, without any artillery to protect them in the rear. Such a sight was never seen on this continent. Each one was sure of success at the commencement of the engagement, that a defeat was enough to turn the reason of the most calm. The cry arose that the rebels were going to cut us off, making the panic still greater, and each one aroused himself for the last great struggle. Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island troops were all in a confused mass: baggage carts upset; ambulances broken down; yet the Black Horse cavalry were stopped in their advance by a19
shot from Sherman's battery.

The retreat was kept up until we reached Centreville, when a small force came to our relief, which gave the men new courage, and they then began to rally. Here companies proceeded to their various encampments. We had settled down for the night, when the order came to retreat to Alexandria; then came the weary march of seven miles, by night, without food or rest, to Fairfax Court House; at which place we arrived about 2 o'clock on the morning of the 22d. After two hours rest we continued the march to Alexandria, making the distance of the retreat twenty-seven miles. It was a hard march; some were lame from sore feet, others slightly wounded; yet life was dear, though in misery.

The wounded that were unable to get from the field were left behind with the dead, and many of them were slaughtered by the brutal enemy. History does not record such outrages among civilized beings. They even threw shell into the hospital while a flag of truce was flying from the roof. I hope the time will come when the brutes will be obliged to kneel and beg for life at the point of the bayonet, held in the hands of the sturdy son of the North. Still, I trust that human feelings will prevail in the heart of each soldier, though many feel a revenge that must be satisfied.

The great defect and cause of our defeat, as near as we can judge, was a lack of ammunition for the batteries. Infantry could do but little in storming such fortifications. Again they had 80,000 men, nearly two to one our. Their loss was very large, as our troops had driven them from three batteries with a large loss each time, and by their own account they were badly cut up.

The Maine and Vermont boys did honor to themselves. They stood a raking fire for one hour, and when the order came to retreat they were among the last to leave the field—and for one mile were exposed to the shell of the rebels. The loss of the 3rd Maine was light, when the exposed situation is taken into consideration. Their officers acted coolly and bravely in leading on their men to the attack. I think the Maine troops showed very courage in the hostile contest, though the New Yorkers do not in their
columns make mention of Maine troops. I judge it to be for this reason—that when our brigade went on the field the day was against us, and those who were not particularly engaged left—such as reporters for instance. Company C. went on with as full ranks as any in the regiment, and the boys went into the work with a true will.

The officers behaved manfully, encouraging their men, and faced the same stuff of Southern export, in shape of shot and shell, that the soldier must face. We are happy to say that they brought off their swords, but their revolvers were empty. The boys are full of pluck, and think after a few days rest, they can go in again. Respectfully,

LITCHFIELD.

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