

Letter from the Second Regiment.

FORT CORCORAN, July 29, 1861.

Messrs. BLISS & SON: I have delayed writing you anything in relation to the great battle, and great defeat as it is also called, at Bull's Run, supposing, in the first place, that some one else had written you; and, in the second place, being desirous of getting information of the whereabouts of several members of our company who were missing. The full account with particulars you will find in the newspapers, most of which are nearly true. But there are many omissions of importance. For instance, in your paper of the 23rd, which we just received to-night, the 2d Wisconsin is not mentioned as being in the fight at all. Now, the truth is, we were in both battles at Bull's Run, on the 18th and 21st. But we did not spend \$50.00 to hire reporters to blazon our deeds to the country through a venal press; and what is more, our officers actually refused to pay the \$50.00 which was demanded for doing so in one particular case.

I can only give you a condensed narration of our part in the proceedings,

"— quorum magna pars fui,"

as I would say, had I the vanity of Aeneas when he told his story to the confiding ear of Dido.

We left our camp near this place on Tuesday, the 16th, in the afternoon, with three days' rations in our haversacks, and with no baggage except our blankets, which were strapped over our shoulders. We marched some fifteen miles and camped at Vienna, where the Ohio boys were attacked in the cars from a masked battery some weeks ago. Starting at daylight next morning we resumed the march, passing through Germantown, where we drew up for a fight, but one or two shots from our cannon sent the enemy flying in double quick time. Here we found batteries just deserted, and quite a quantity of provisions. The batteries, I must say, like most we encountered on the road as far as Centreville, seemed more to have been built to scare us than to injure us. The roads, however, were obstructed with fallen timber, which delayed us very much in removing. Here in Germantown, to the discredit of some of our troops, one or two houses were set on fire and consumed. We pushed on from here until within a short distance of Centreville, when we camped, and the boys had a taste of secession mutton, chicken, etc. The scene on the march, though tiresome, was gay. As far ahead and back as the eye could reach the road was crowded with men, horses, baggage wagons and artillery. It seemed the march of an army to certain victory.

We lay in this camp until about 9 or 10 o'clock in the morning, when we heard the booming of cannon in advance on our left. This was Gen. Tyler's first introduction to the masked batteries of the rebels. About four o'clock a courier came riding up, his horse covered with foam, with orders for Col. Sherman to advance immediately with his brigade, to which we were attached. Of course we lost no time, and in a few minutes were on the march, and soon arrived on the ground above the battery, and were drawn up in line in the woods. The balls from the rifled guns of the rebels flew around and over us lively, crushing trees in their path and killing one of our men and wounding two others. Finding it impossible to dislodge the enemy without great loss of life, we were ordered to return to a camp about a mile in advance of Centreville, on the main road. Our boys had shown their courage and coolness under fire without returning it, and were highly complimented by Col. Sherman. We met while going down to the attack the 12th New York and 2d Massachusetts, puffing and blowing, saying they were all cut to pieces and had left at least half of their regiments on the field. Their fear lent wings to their fancy; the whole loss of all engaged being only some forty killed, but many scattered. There was no reason to complain of the Miners' Guards,—all being ready to "go in" and take a hand, and only one dodging the balls which passed over our heads.

We now remained in camp quietly awaiting reinforcements until Saturday evening, when we received orders to prepare two days' rations and to be ready to start at 2 o'clock the next morning. At this time every man was ready, his haversack filled with hard bread and cold tongue, and silently as possible we took up our line of march, over a hilly and timbered country. On the way we encountered several of the "contraband" whose masters had deserted their homes, having been impressed into the rebel army. They said that the slaves were kept quiet by the story that the Northern men only wanted to get them to sell in Cuba. They did not all believe the story, however. They gave us correct information in reference to the rebel batteries, as subsequent events proved.

Of the first attack by the left wing, and of the flanking movement of the right wing, I have not time to speak. We were in the center, and from the position we occupied could tell by the dust and smoke the progress of the other divisions. At first, although, after we were drawn into a line on the edge of the wood, we could see a large extent of country, where not a man could be seen, and it was only after our artillery began to play with thin shells and cannister shot that the men began to swarm out of their hollows, all of which were densely crowded.

About 10 o'clock, after the left wing had taken the first masked battery, and Hunter and Heintzelman had made their attack on

the right flank of the enemy, we were ordered to advance, which we did in double-quick time; and after fording a stream and climbing a precipitous bluff, we formed in line of battle. The first sight that met our eye was the enemy retreating before the gallant charge of the New York 71st, who were slaying them like sheep. The slaughter was awful. But we had no time to lose. We advanced over a rise of ground and found ourselves directly in front of the rebel batteries on the opposite ridge. We marched forward under this fire until we reached a hollow, when we were partially protected from their shot, but not from their shell. A piece from one dented my sword, and others hit several of the men, but nobody was killed. We were soon ordered to cross a muddy stream and charge up the hill in the direction of one of the rebel batteries. This was gallantly done, and the regiment drawn up in a road flanking the battery. The Fire Zouaves were fighting gallantly on our right. Our men now went to work with a will, and stood under the direct fire of a strong body of infantry for more than an hour, and fought with a spirit and determination which was much admired by their neighbors, the Zouaves, who cheered the Wisconsin boys, and several of them afterward remarked that the Zouaves themselves did no better fighting.

A constant fire was kept up, only interrupted for an instant by the cry of some traitor in camp, "Don't shoot your friends!" The hoisting of the stars and stripes by the rebels deceived many until the deception was dispelled by a volley of musketry. Soon a movement was discovered on our right which proved to be a reinforcement of fresh troops from Manassas. Up to this time the victory was with us. The enemy were giving away in every direction, and had lost several of their best batteries. We were now ordered to fall back for the purpose of reforming our line and renewing the attack, and at the same time of evading the flank fire. We had now had over twenty men killed and some sixty wounded. The regiment fell back to the opposite ridge, and under the fire from the battery was thrown into some confusion, like all the others on the field. But the order was given to fall in, and a large number was collected around the flag under one of the regimental officers, who conducted them down the hill where the panic had commenced, and then without any officer they made their way with the crowd in the wake of the "glorious 69th" to Centreville. Near here the regiment was re-organized by several of the company officers, and marched in obedience to orders from Gen. McDowell to camp at this place,—a tedious march of thirty-five miles, after fighting and marching from 2 o'clock in the morning. We did not arrive here till 10 a. m. on Monday morning, having rested only two hours at Fairfax. Thousands were in camp before us. What caused the panic, I do not know. The newspapers may tell. I think it was a want of officers to rally the men. It certainly was not want of courage in the men, for they had shown the contrary; it certainly was want of organization that caused the disastrous retreat, after having at one time gained a glorious victory.

The loss in the Miners' Guards was small compared with that in two or three other companies. This was owing to the fact that Lieut. Bishop was detailed, just as we started to make the charge, with thirty men, to assist in manning and putting in position the big thirty-two pound Parrott gun, and who found it impossible to rejoin the company under the raking fire to which they would have been exposed. They did good service, however, where they were.

William Owens, of Dodgeville, was killed by a shot through the head; Lieut. LaFleiche was wounded by a shot in the shoulder; Lieut. Bishop was injured internally by his exertions; Phillip Lawrence was wounded by a shot in the breast; Emile Peterson was wounded by shot in the hip; Christian Kessler was also wounded, and is yet among the missing. James Gregory, George W. Dilley and Walter P. Smith have not been heard from, and are probably taken prisoners, as they were well when last seen. They are brave boys, and we hope to see them again soon. The wounded are all doing well and will soon recover.

Of course, the boys were tired, and the more so that they stood around the whole of Monday, in the rain, waiting for accommodations at the Fort. They are recruiting rapidly now, though quite a number are unwell. They will go into the next fight with more coolness, but not with more courage. They fought like old soldiers, and won the praise of all spectators, hundreds of whom were looking on.

I neglected to mention the fact, that, soon after crossing Bull's Run, on the retreat, the cavalry charged on the regimental colors. The Wisconsin boys rallied around and drove back the cavalry after emptying eight or ten saddles. The colors were not afterward disturbed.

We are now encamped within the walls of Fort Corcoran, ready to assist in the defense of the capital, which lies constantly in sight. How long we shall remain here we do not know. We hope to do our duty wherever we are, and to have a share in the good work of delivering our country from the conspirators who are seeking its destruction.

Hoping to have leisure to continue this brief correspondence, I must retire to my wearied pillow, as the snores of my companions remind me that it is high time. A.