

Battle near Manassas

A Letter from J. H. Whitteley

CAMP ANSONIA, WASHINGTON, D. C.

July 23d, 1861

Ma. Bland, — Probably ere this you have heard of the Battle near Manassas Gap and the result. I was one of the participants and, although in the warmest of the fight, came off uninjured. On the morning of the 21st (Sunday) our Regiment was ordered to march to some point not mentioned, and at 8 o'clock on that morning we joined Gen. McDowell's Division and started from our camp, seven miles West of Fairfax Court House. Our Regiment was the 4th in the Division and so we were in the first part of the column. We marched until 10 o'clock, passing through woods about seven miles in length—the distance being about 15 miles—when we heard a heavy and distinct firing to the south-west. Most of the Regiment was nearly "tuckered out" by the rapid march, so that, under any other circumstances, we could have gone no farther; but as we were "aching" to engage in anything like a fight, we pushed ahead at double quick—the distance remaining being about five miles. We came in sight of our batteries, on the top of a hill, in about an hour, and were nearly the first on the battle-field, for such it seriously proved to be. The enemy was stationed on the opposite hill-side, concealed in thick heavy woods, with their batteries well protected on the top of the hill beyond them. Our guns were already at work, and theirs kept up a steady response. Col. Slocum, our leader, conceived the idea of taking the enemy's batteries with his regiment, and accordingly the order was given to *forward*—and forward we went.

In the valley was a stone house, and our Regiment fled to the right, no enemy as yet being seen. As we advanced, a steady fire was opened on us from the forest, which we were unable to return. Facing it as best we might, we formed in battle order in front of the building. While we were doing this, a Regiment of the enemy marched into line directly opposite, and waved the American Flag. One of the number then advanced to our lines, and informed Col. Slocum that the Regiment wished to surrender. Our Adjutant seized a havelock, and riding a short distance, waved it in the air repeatedly. The rebels answered by waving handkerchiefs, which they continued until the Adjutant was quite near them, when they opened a most destructive fire upon our front. This took us by surprise, and quite staggered us; but recovering under the orders of the Col, we answered with a well-directed volley from our old Harper's Ferry muskets, which caused considerable confu-

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keys, which caused considerable confusion in their ranks. The first volley from them brought Asa Park, our second Lieut., to the ground—the ball passing through his heart. I stood immediately by his side and was engaged in ramming down a bullet at the time. He faintly gasped, "save me" and dropped to the ground. I forgot everything then, and calling for aid from one or two of our boys, I succeeded in getting his body out of the reach of bullets. I returned to the front for my musket, but could not find it, and so appropriated a dead comrade's, who was killed while engaged in loading it.

I saw many brave fellows down on every side, some of whom were already dead and others nearly so. I tell you, Mr. B, that was a moment I can never forget. Friends, whose acquaintances I had formed in my short life in camp, were dropping off every side. Our party was considerably cut up, but still our Colonel was firm in his purpose. With tears streaming down his cheeks, he would cry out, "For God's and your Country's sake, men, if not for your own, take those batteries!"—Our men fought hard and bravely—cheered on by the zeal of the officers, and earnestness of those who were wounded—and it was not until a large body of the rebels appeared close at hand that we were ordered to retreat. We formed on top of the hill, and missed many of our bravest men. Just after the order was given to retreat, a Minie ball struck our Colonel on the leg just below the thigh, breaking the bone and disabling him from further service.

A number of other Regiments now came up, and immediately marched to the place lately occupied by us. Among these was the Regiment of Fire Zouaves, lately commanded by the famous Col. Ellsworth. They marched directly in front of the batteries, and fought desperately enough. Two batteries were carried, and more of our Regiments came up to their relief.—The Black Horse Cavalry, so noted in connection with the praise of Gov. Wise, charged upon their rear, carrying the American Flag. At first the Zouaves were deceived, but shortly after perceiving the deceit, fired into them. The Cavalry was 200 strong, and every saddle but six was emptied! But the brave Zouaves suffered intensely. The fire of the batteries traxed them severely—men falling at every fire. The New York 71st and other Regiments soon after came to their relief. There were eight or ten Regi-

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ments on the enemy's ground, which were doing fearful execution. When a large detachment fled out from the woods in the rear of the enemy, whereupon all the Federal troops retreated

but a Regiment of regulars, who did not doubt they would fall back into the woods and load their pieces, and then rally out, formed once, and dropped a score of men at every fire. The battle continued until 8 o'clock, when the army was ordered to retreat, which they did. We marched all night, and took 10 o'clock, on the day following, when we reached Springton Heights—the distance was 45 miles—making in

all, 60 miles steady march and a night of six hours. We did not sleep a wink for 60 hours, and we felt considerably

fatigued. The sun was about 10 o'clock on the 19th, and we were relieved by the 20th. We were

was in the rear of his men, and that he received a severe wound in the leg.

Our loss was about 1700 killed and 1500 wounded. The loss of the enemy was as large—perhaps larger. I can attach blame to nobody. Our men all acted like heroes and retreated from strength of force. There are 20 missing from our Company, and others in the Regiment suffered as severely.

William Sampson, son of T. B. Sampson, of Binghamton, has not yet turned up. He was wounded on the field, and was probably afterwards butchered by the cavalry of the enemy, who killed every surviving man left on the field. Corporal Fairchild, Corporal Spencer, and others are among the missing.

Sergeant Conistock was set upon by four cavalry men, when he shot the one nearest him, a second caught him by the hair of his head, and threw him over the saddle bow. He soon after came in sight of friends, and shouted to draw their attention, when the captain dropped him and fled. Others of our company met with narrow escapes, but I will not stop to note them here.

Every body engaged in the battle says it was the fiercest and most terrible of any ever fought. I tell you, to see the cannon balls and shells flying in every direction, and hear the whizzing of the bullets, as they passed close to your head, created no very pleasant emotion. You can form no correct opinion of the affair.

We were kindly treated by the ladies of this place, upon our arrival. I was treated to a good substantial dinner by the family of a Mrs. Leake. I shall always remember them with the highest feelings of respect.

An attack is partially anticipated on Alexandria. The 23d (Southern Tier) crossed over Long Bridge to that place this morning.

Many of our officers may resign. If they do, the Regiment will probably be disbanded, but if they don't, we will "recruit" to fill up. I will come to Union if I can.

Give my respects to all inquiring friends, and tell them I shall be happy to hear from them at any time.

Before long I shall write again— "Blockhead" sends his compliments this week. Both he, Asa Howard and Charles VanDusen are "alive and kicking," though considerably used up.

Yours,
HIB