

MISCELLANEOUS

REPORTS & PAMPHLETS

relating to the

MILITARY
SURGERY

of the

WAR *of the* REBELLION.

Pamphlet Vol. 194

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by

Bvt. Lt. Col. G. A. Otis U.S.A.

SURGEON'S OFFICE

GENERAL RECORDS

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REPORT OF THE EVENTS

CONNECTED WITH THE

FIRST BULL RUN CAMPAIGN.

BY

W. S. KING, Surgical Director, U. S. A.

*Single Cases
returned
Spain*

The first battle of Bull Run will ever be memorable in the annals of the country as the great contest at the commencement of the struggle now going on for the maintenance of the supremacy of the Union. Having a few weeks previous arrived in Washington, from a distant frontier station, I was detailed to report as Medical Director, to the General in command of the Department of N. E. Virginia. Upon reaching the headquarters at Arlington, where our forces were assembling, I became painfully impressed with the vastness of the work to be done, to prepare for the coming conflict, and the very short time, apparently, that would be allowed for the purpose. I found the army with which we were to meet the enemy, to be composed of the best, and also of the worst material I had ever met with. This force had been hastily collected; many of the men had never been examined by medical officers, and were inferior to those in the regular army, where the physique is more carefully regarded. Impressed by the lessons of the Crimea with the importance of hygienic measures in the camps, I began my visits to them, and pointed out the necessity of observing these precautions—particularly to those who possessed the power to enforce them.

It is while engaged in the labor of introducing sanitary reforms, that the want of substantial rank is most sensibly felt by the medical officer, and more or less paralyses all his efforts. If he finds an unusual number of cases of disease in a regiment and ascertains that the walls of the tents are seldom if ever raised to admit fresh air, the straw becoming

saturated with emanations from the bodies and breaths of the men, and low forms of fever being thus engendered, and should he naturally desire to instantly change this condition of things, he will find, by bitter experience, no slight difficulty in inducing those in authority, to listen to his requests or to act on his suggestions. When we learn that diseases destroy more soldiers than do powder and the sword, it cannot be too often repeated that these disastrous results may be easily prevented by simple hygienic precautions, for the institution of which there must be united and harmonious action between the field officer and the surgeon. This can be effected in no other way than by adopting the practice of admitting the chief medical officer of each separate army, to a seat in the council of war. As a general rule, such officers would bring with them tried experience, and extended and varied information on many branches of knowledge to the benefit of the service. To give weight to his opinion, the chief medical officer should have a higher rank than that of Major, his present status, there being no provision at present whereby it is possible for him to hope for promotion. He is the best judge as to the condition of the men, as to their capability to sustain a forced march, and whether the physical endurance proposed to be exacted of them will not so overtask their powers as to unfit them for the duty required. The selection of a camping ground for the night is also a matter of great importance. A spot thus fixed upon may from necessity be occupied for weeks; and should it prove unhealthy, the evil must be suffered, whereas in a majority of cases a more healthy location would have answered equally well for all military purposes.

Every Medical Director *at least*, should have the authority to order the prompt removal of a nuisance that is contaminating the air; and such military assistance should be furnished him as he may require for the immediate carrying into effect of any measures he may deem essential to the prevention of disease in camps, provided they do not interfere with the military necessity of the position. The orders of medical directors relating to sanitary matters *only* should be binding upon all, and should not be disregarded unless satisfactory reasons be given. On landing at Rangoun, during the first Burmese war, the superintending surgeon of the Bengal division there, had warned the officer commanding, that without fresh food and vegetables the soldiers must perish from scurvy. The reply was: "medical opinions are very good when called for." Is not this answer characteristic also of the opinions entertained by many at the present time in regard to the advice of medical officers in similar cases?

In the Bull Run campaign, Surgeon Magruder and myself

were, with few exceptions, the only medical officers who had previously served with troops, and our advice and assistance were eagerly sought, in relation to the details of camp life and the mode of procuring the necessary medical supplies. In preparing for the expected battle, a limited number of ambulances which had been furnished, was distributed with great care, so as to equalize the amount of transportation among the regiments. I made an estimate of twenty wagons for our medical supplies, which, although approved by the commanding officer, did not result in their being sent. A few days before the forward movement, directions were issued by the General commanding, to have the army put in light marching order; that all officers and soldiers should carry with them three and a half days cooked rations, and that all baggage and stores of every kind should be left behind in camp, to be subsequently sent for. As the conveyances estimated for had not been furnished, these arrangements made it impossible to transport any medical supplies except such as could be placed in the ambulances or poked into the forage wagons, and this I directed the medical officers to do.

*by the
medical*

The command moved on the Fairfax road on the afternoon of the 16th of July, 1861, and after a march of seven miles halted for the night. At daylight, the following morning, the advance was resumed. The day was unusually hot and the troops plucked with avidity the blackberries growing abundantly by the roadside, as a means of relieving both thirst and hunger, for which purpose the fruit is eminently fitted. The road we found impassable in many places owing to felled trees which the rebels had placed in our way. Arriving, at length, near Fairfax we discovered that the enemy had abandoned their works, and that a small force left evidently to watch our movements had just gone, leaving behind in their haste, carpet-bags, trunks, a keg of whiskey, and half eaten meals. Our troops were in excellent health and no cases of disease were reported to me or came under my observation.

We encamped for the night, near Fairfax. July 19th was spent by the General and Staff in making a reconnoissance of the roads between Fairfax and Centreville. In the afternoon, heavy firing was heard on our left, towards Blackburn's Ford. Riding rapidly in that direction, to ascertain the cause, we found that the division of General Tyler had been smartly engaged with the enemy. We pursued our course on the road leading to the Ford, and soon met the ambulances with the dead, wounded and disabled men. One soldier had had his face shot away completely. Some in the ambulances were not wounded, but were disabled from sunstroke or exhaustion. The ambulances were stained with blood, evincing the terrible

19th

earnestness with which the rebels had commenced their struggle. I immediately dispatched Surgeon Magruder to accompany the forward ambulance to Centreville, and to select suitable buildings, for hospital purposes, and I followed him with the remainder, after picking up all the wounded we could find. A hotel, a church and a large dwelling, were selected by Dr. M., and a portion of the wounded was placed in them before my arrival. Unfortunately, two of the ambulances had been drawn up on the wrong side of the road, and the division of General Tyler of twelve thousand troops, marching in close order filled the passage between our wounded and the church hospital, and we were obliged to wait for two hours, for the mass of men and wagons to pass before they could be taken out. Several attempts were made to cross the road, but such was the press and confusion, that it was found to be impossible, and we were obliged to desist. An unexpected difficulty was now encountered, in the great scarcity of water. There were very few wells in Centreville, and these had been so exhausted by our thirsty men that they were nearly all dry. Water procured with great difficulty, and placed in basins, for the purpose of washing the wounded, was snatched up and drank by stragglers, as they passed, before they could be prevented. By 9 o'clock P. M., through great exertion, on the part of Dr. Magruder and myself, we succeeded in organizing to some extent, our impromptu hospitals. Several amputations were performed, one, I remember, of the thigh, which resulted fatally the next day, and one of the leg which did well.

To give an idea of some of our difficulties on this night, I might mention that the hospital in the church, as soon as emptied became filled again by men stepping out of the ranks as they passed, in search of their companions, or for something to eat or drink. Having no guard, we were very much embarrassed and incommoded by this crowd, and it required a great amount of exertion before order and quiet could be secured. And here I would recommend all medical directors to wear conspicuously, the insignia of their rank, while on duty, as I found it rather awkward, notwithstanding I had on the usual undress uniform of an officer, to have my right to give orders, repeatedly questioned by surgeons, hospital stewards and others, who having had directions from those known to them, were unwilling to obey strangers, if the commands appeared different from those they had been receiving. A medical director should always have with him at least two mounted orderlies, to convey his orders, and, if necessary, to enforce them.

As soon as General Tyler, who commanded the division which had engaged the enemy arrived, I sought him and

obtained a sufficient number of men as a guard for all our hospitals, and to procure a supply of water for our wounded. An incident which occurred at Centreville will show how the distinction so often made between Federal and State soldiers, may operate injuriously to the service. I had directed an ambulance with two wounded soldiers to be taken to a large dwelling selected as a hospital, and to have them placed in charge of the medical officer in attendance. Passing some hours after, I found these men still in the ambulance, and on inquiry was informed that the surgeon had declined to receive them, because they did not belong to his regiment. I requested the surgeon, who appeared at the door, to inform me, why he had not taken the soldiers into the hospital, when he commenced an explanation by stating that he considered his obligation to extend no farther than to his own regiment, and he was proceeding in the most serious and emphatic manner to justify his course, when I cut short his argument by promptly ordering the removal of the men from the ambulance, and I remained long enough to see that they received the necessary attention.

Surgeon Magruder and myself made frequent visits to all the hospitals, assisting in their organization and operations, and helping to make the wounded as comfortable as our means would admit of. This task we completed near midnight, and completely worn out with fatigue, having eaten nothing since daylight, we sallied out to find our camp at headquarters, wherever that might be. In a strange country, on a dark and rainy night, without any information as to where the camp had been removed since morning, it seemed hopeless to seek it. Presuming it must be somewhere in the rear, we rode in that direction, and fortunately, after going a mile across the fields, towards a light, stumbled upon the object of our search.

The 19th and 20th of July were occupied in camp, waiting for the arrival of subsistence. We embraced the opportunity to repair our ambulances and again visit the hospitals at Centreville. Sensible of the want of additional medical supplies which would be needed in the event of the expected battle, and knowing that the sympathy of the entire country had been aroused to the importance of providing with the utmost liberality for our sick and wounded, I felt it my duty to make known our needs to the Surgeon General, stating the circumstances in which our army had been left and the impossibility of bringing with us, for want of adequate transportation, a larger amount of medical stores. These points I urged with earnestness, and expressed my anxiety that nothing should be wanting on my part to the fulfilment of the just expectation of the country; and I requested that everything should be sent, without stint, that

would be required by an army in the field and on the eve of battle. This appeal was responded to. I was informed that the needed supplies would be sent next day to Fairfax Station, seven miles distant, the railroad having been repaired to that place.

All our wounded in the Blackburn affair that could be removed were forwarded on the 20th, in ambulances, with a proper escort, to Fairfax Station, to be sent by rail to Alexandria, where I had established a hospital but a few days before, for the special purpose of receiving our sick and wounded.

On the night of the 20th, all the division commanders were assembled at headquarters, to arrange the plan of battle. After receiving their orders, the council broke up, about 11 o'clock, P. M., with directions to take up the line of march to Bull Run, before daylight, by the various routes designated.

The chances of the battle to ensue next day were gravely discussed by the staff officers till a late hour of the night. All seemed deeply impressed with the magnitude of the events that hung upon the success or defeat of our arms, and longed for the moment when the suspense would be ended, as we hoped, in a glorious victory. It was late before I closed my eyes in sleep, as I could not help thinking of the strangeness of my position, and could with difficulty realize that the army of the Federal Government was menaced by another composed of our countrymen, the chief leaders of which I had been associated with for many years at a distant post, and with some of whom I had parted but a few weeks before in New Mexico.

On the morning of July 20th, 1861, the General commanding, accompanied by his staff, passed, at daylight, through our columns, already moving in the direction of Bull Run, until he reached a point beyond Cubb's Bridge, where a road inclined to the right, through a dense body of timber, and crossed the run a short distance above Sedley Church. Here we halted in the shade, as the day, even thus early, promised to be one of the hottest of the season. While observing the troops passing, we discussed the prospects of the day before us. Bets were offered and taken as to whether we should sleep at Manassas, or elsewhere. I perceived that our troops marched at double quick, and some at a full run, while many, overcome by the heat, threw away their blankets and haversacks. I expressed my opinion to the general, that owing to their rapid movement, the men would be exhausted before they arrived on the scene of action. In this view he acquiesced, and directed the men "not to run;" but, as the officers behind, from an idea that great haste was necessary, constantly repeated the command to "close up," the troops were kept at a run a great part of the

way. The weather was excessively hot, and, as one of the causes of the Bull Run failure, I desire to record my belief that the exhaustion of our forces, by the long and forced march, contributed as much as anything else to the disasters of the day. The comparative freshness of the rebel troops gave them great and decided advantage. It is often the case that on what may be termed little things, if there can be such in a battle, the fortune of war depends. I observed, on several occasions where our men faltered, apparently, or did not pursue with vigor an advantage gained, that it was manifestly owing to complete exhaustion, rather than to any want of spirit or courage. At one time, when a small body of troops was called upon by the general and staff to renew the attack, I saw at a glance that their failure to do so was from inability for further exertion. The spirit of these men was willing, but the flesh was weak.

After Gen. Hunter's division had filed along the road on the right, as mentioned, Gen. McDowell rode rapidly ahead, crossing Bull Run just as the advance of Hunter's column was in the act of passing. Advancing through the woods about half a mile after crossing the creek, we emerged into an open field a short distance beyond Sedley Church. At this moment we were saluted with a volley of musketry and artillery by the enemy concealed in the woods on our left. Fortunately, the bullets fell harmlessly, knocking up the dust under our horses' feet, while the cannon balls passed over our heads. Immediately wheeling round, we had the first view of the rebel forces, in a long line on the slope of a hill. On the general's remarking "there they are," I beheld the array of grey-coated soldiers who were evidently watching us, and I became impressed with a sense of that determined resistance to Federal authority on the part of the rebels that has since been manifested so repeatedly. Our troops now hurried forward, the artillery was placed in position, and the action soon became general. Desirous of seeing all that was going on, I accompanied the general in his visits to those places where the contest raged fiercest. I was thus enabled to give a comprehensive supervision of affairs connected with the medical department of the army, and to see that the wounded were being attended to by the regimental officers. I found the medical officers, as a general rule, on the alert, and many performing their duties coolly under the fire of the enemy. My impression at the commencement of the battle was, that there would be a brisk skirmish, and then the rebels would most probably fall back and take up a new position. I thought it would be a small task, therefore, to make out a list of the killed and wounded, and with notebook in hand I began to count the number of each. It is a

singular fact that I observed near one hundred dead before one wounded. Soon I became convinced that a most desperate engagement was at hand, and I directed Surgeon Magruder who had thus far remained at the headquarters, to proceed to Sedley Church, which was near by, yet out of the line of fire, and to prepare it, and if necessary, a couple of houses close to the church, for the reception of our wounded, and to send forward the ambulances as rapidly as possible. These orders were promptly executed, and the drivers brought their conveyances as close to the points where the wounded were as the nature of the ground would permit. Having my saddlebags well supplied with instruments, dressings, liniments, etc., I found frequent occasion for their use in restraining hemorrhage and relieving exhaustion and suffering on the spot where the wound was received.

Twice our men drove the rebels over the crest of the hill, and victory seemed for a brief period to perch upon our banners, and shouts of triumph went up as the general and staff rode along our lines, during a few brief moments, while the enemy's batteries seemed to have been silenced. But this exultation was of short duration: the rebels again appeared, and their artillery opened more fiercely than ever. Our men could not be again rallied, from sheer exhaustion mostly, I believe, and we commenced slowly and sadly to retire. As I followed the general and about six of the staff officers to the right of the enemy, it did not occur to me that all was over and the battle was lost, until we had crossed the creek at five o'clock P. M. We then entered a field, and dismounted to eat a few blackberries, for we had partaken of nothing since three o'clock in the morning. Hardly had we got from our horses when some one exclaimed: "General, the enemy are upon us." Turning to look we found the rebels not more than two hundred yards distant. A cannon ball, that struck the ground a few paces from us, informed us that we were observed; and, remounting in double quick time, we galloped at full speed across the field and leaping our steeds over the fence into a thick woods, we were soon concealed from our foes. Pushing our way as rapidly as possible through the thick undergrowth, without heeding scratches or blows, in the direction of Centreville, and avoiding all roads, we finally reached at Cubb's creek, the way along which we had marched in the morning, and arrived at Centreville, tired and disappointed, near sundown. Here we waited for the coming of our straggling troops. After sending them on in advance, followed by all the wagons, we left at half-past ten o'clock P. M. for Fairfax, where we intended to remain till morning.

The weather for some time past had been excessively dry and

hot, and the dust of the turnpike, between Centreville and Fairfax, raised by our soldiers and wagons in passing, floated over the road like a thick fog, and made it impossible to see for a distance of more than ten paces. In this passage, horse, foot, and dragoons were jammed in great confusion; upturned wagons and their contents blocked the way at short intervals, making it necessary for horsemen to leave the road in order to go round the obstructions, and return again. I may say it was one of the most unpleasant marches of the campaign, and so slow was our progress that we did not reach Fairfax, a distance of only seven miles, till two o'clock in the morning. I soon became separated from the general and staff, until on nearing Fairfax, I recognized Major Brown, one of the general's aids. Finding we could see nor hear any thing of the general, or any one to inform us of the plan of march, we lay down in a field close by till daylight. As soon as morning dawned, we saddled our horses, and finding the whole army *en route* to Washington, we followed, overtaking the general on the roadside about seven miles from the city. Fearing that the supplies which had been ordered to Fairfax Station might fall into the hands of the confederates, I obtained permission from the general to hasten forward to Washington to inform the Surgeon General, if not too late, to have them returned to Alexandria. Fortunately there had been some delay, and on inquiry, it was found that the supplies had not left the latter place.

The report of Surgeon Magruder, U. S. A., as given below, in regard to our wounded, conveyed during the action to Sedley Church, will show all that was done up to the time of our defeat, and compelled abandonment of the field. Our retreat from the ground occupied, operated like a curtain to conceal from view all knowledge of the subsequent history of our cases, or the results of our ministrations. So rigidly and effectually were all avenues closed by the rebels that no attempt to obtain information met with any success.

A few days after the battle, General Wadsworth entered the enemy's lines to bring away the remains of one or two distinguished officers, and also to succor, and, if possible, to remove our wounded. I, and Assistant Surgeon Schell, U. S. A., followed with thirty-nine ambulances, and arrived at midnight at Bailey's Cross Roads, which was in possession of our pickets, there to await the return of the general, when we were to be informed of the result of his mission.

At daylight next morning, finding that he had not come back, I took several ambulances and proceeded to the rooms of the Sanitary Committee in Washington, and procured everything that I thought would be required for wounded men on the way,

and hastened back again to Bailey's Cross Roads. Arriving in that vicinity, I met Dr. Schell with the remainder of the ambulances, proceeding back to Washington. He informed me that the General had completely failed to obtain the permission desired, and that the enemy's cavalry having driven in our pickets, he was fearful lest the ambulances with their supplies should be captured. All the knowledge gained, was that the wounded would probably be removed to Richmond. A few days after, I was ordered to report for duty, with General Banks' division, and I therefore close this narrative. I am aware that the medical history of this campaign is very meagre; yet, imperfect as it is, it may serve as a record of events not supplied by other reports.

W S. KING,
Surgical Director, U. S. A.

ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, VA.
July 25th, 1861.

DOCTOR:—In compliance with your wishes, expressed during a conversation this morning, I have the honor to submit the following very brief report in relation to the engagement at Bull's Run:

On the morning of the 21st inst., as you are aware, I accompanied General McDowell, as one of his staff, to the battle-field, when I remained with yourself and the other members of his staff in close attendance upon the General until ordered by you as Medical Director to go in search of some house or houses suitable, and as near the field as possible, to be converted into a hospital, for the wounded. After only a short search, I found and took possession of a stone church, pleasantly situated in a grove of timber, directly on the side and to the right of the road we had passed on advancing to the attack. I then ordered that the ambulances proceed to the field to bring off the wounded as quickly as possible to the hospital, which order was executed very promptly.

Upon taking possession of the church, I set men to work at removing the seats from the body of the church with as little injury to them as possible—had the floor covered with what blankets could be found—buckets of water brought, instruments and dressings placed in convenient places for use, an operating table improvised, and sent off men to the fields near by to bring hay for bedding.

Very soon after the work of fitting up the building had begun the ambulances commenced returning from the field loaded with wounded men.

In about two hours the church both upon the main floor and

in the gallery was completely filled, and I was obliged to take possession of three other unoccupied buildings which are situated about seventy-five paces further down, and on the opposite side of the road towards the creek. So soon as I could get them cleared out, wounded men were carried into them until they were filled also. For want of other buildings, I was obliged to order many of the wounded to be laid under the trees in the grove immediately around the church.

As soon as I had established the hospitals and the work of removing the wounded to them had commenced, quite a number of medical officers of different regiments, came in, offered their services and betook themselves immediately to work in rendering all the assistance in their power. Among those particularly distinguished, it affords me pleasure to mention the names of Assistant Surgeons, C. C. Gray, H. R. Sittiman and Sternberg of the Medical Corps of the *Regular* Army, Surgeon C. Gray, 11th N. Y., Vols., Surgeon Foster Swift and Assistant Surgeon Winston and Dr. Graw of the 8th Regiment N. Y. Militia. Several others also distinguished themselves in their assiduous attentions to the wounded, but as their names are unknown to me, I am unable to mention them, as I should wish to do.

I had no opportunity to ascertain correctly the number of wounded brought to the hospitals, but think there could not have been less than two hundred and fifty.

Several capital operations were performed, and many of a minor character also, before the rush of the retreating columns crowded the hospitals so completely that work for the time being was suspended.

After the retreat commenced and it was found impossible to carry off the wounded, it became a question as to which of the medical gentlemen present would remain to take care of the wounded. Assistant Surgeons Gray and Sternburg of the Regular Army volunteered to surrender themselves as prisoners, for the purpose of taking charge of the Regulars, and Surgeon Swift and Assistant Surgeons Winston and De Graw of 8th Regiment N. Y. Militia, also gave themselves up to attend the wounded of their regiment as well as others of the volunteer forces. These gentlemen all staid at the hospital located by me on your order.

I have the honor to be, Doctor,
Very Respectfully,
Your Obed't., Serv't.,
D. S. MAGRUDER,

Assit., Surg., U. S. A., on Genl. McDowell's Staff.

Dr. W. S. KING,

Medical Director,
Dept. N. E. Virginia, Arlington Heights, Va.

The following very imperfect resume is appended :

1st. Our troops in the action of the 18th of July, 1861, were exposed to the fire of artillery at long range. In the battle on the 21st of July, 1861, of Bull's Run, the troops were exposed to the fire of artillery and musketry at long and short range. Duration of battle, seven hours.

2nd. The casualties of the action at Blackburn's Ford, July 18th, 1861, were as follows, (approximately,)

Killed, 10

Wounded, 33

Aggregate, 43. Three of the wounded died within twenty-four hours after the reception of the wound. The wounded in the above action were sent on the evening of the 20th of July in ambulances to Alexandria.

3rd. Many of the wounded of the Bull Run fight found their way to Alexandria, and accompanying our army in its retreat were helped along to the hospitals in the vicinity of Washington; many who gave out by the way, were brought in the day following in ambulances sent out for them. I can form no idea of their number. Immediately after the action, I directed the Regimental Medical Officers to send in a report of the casualties of their respective regiments.

As large numbers who were at first reported killed are found to have straggled, *only*, a long time usually is required to obtain correct results after a battle, I was ordered to join Genl. Bank's division before reports were received sufficient for an approximation even. I must therefore refer you to reports of Genl. McDowell, or to Surg. Magruder, U. S. A., who remained with the command.

The wounded during the action were removed from such portions of the field as were accessible, to Sedley Church and vicinity, as described in the report of Surgeon Magruder. The maps will show the situation of this Church.

I am unable to make any report as to our wounded on the field in possession of the enemy, and have no knowledge as to where they or those left in the hospital at Sedley Church and buildings near by, were removed.

The report of the General Commanding will show the strength of the command.

W. S. KING,
Surg. and Med. Direc.