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STATE CONVENTION.]

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THE BATTLE OF BETHEL CHURCH.

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA, {
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT, Raleigh, June 21, 1861. }

To the Honorable the President

and Members of the Convention:

GENTLEMEN:—Herewith I transmit a dispatch from Gen. D. H. Hill, giving further interesting details of the Battle of Bethel Church.

Too much praise cannot be accorded to our brave soldiers who were engaged in that action. I will at an early day, as far as my power extends, manifest the public approval of their gallantry and good conduct upon the occasion referred to by suitable promotions.

Respectfully submitted,

JOHN W. ELLIS.

OFFICIAL REPORT OF COL. HILL.

HON. JOHN W. ELLIS, *Governor of North Carolina:*

SIR—I have the honor to report that in obedience to orders from the Colonel commanding, I marched on the 6th inst., with my Regiment and four pieces of Maj. Randolph's battery, from Yorktown, on the Hampton Road, to Bethel Church, nine miles from Hampton.

We reached there, after dark, on a wet night, and slept without tents. Early on the morning of the 7th, I made a

reconnoissance of the ground preparatory to fortifying. I found a branch of Back River in our front and encircling our right flank. On our left was a dense and almost impassable wood, except about 150 yards of old field. The breadth of the road, a thick wood, and a narrow cultivated field covered our rear. The nature of the ground determined me to make an enclosed work, and I had the invaluable aid of Lieut. Col. Lee, of my regiment, in its plan and construction. Our position had the inherent defect of being *commanded* by an *immense* field immediately in front of it, upon which the masses of the enemy might be readily deployed. Presuming that an attempt would be made to carry the bridge across the stream, a battery was made for its especial protection, and Maj. Randolph placed his guns so as to sweep all the approaches to it. The occupation of two commanding eminences beyond the creek and on our right, would have greatly strengthened our position, but our force was too weak to admit of the occupation of more than one of them. A battery was laid out on it for one of Randolph's Howitzers. We had only 25 spades, 6 axes, and 3 picks, but these were busily plied all day and night of the 7th, and all day on the 8th. On the afternoon of the 8th I learned that a marauding party of the enemy was in a few miles of us. I called for a party of 34 men to drive them back. Lieut. Roberts, of F company of my regiment, promptly responded, and in five minutes his command was en route. I detached Maj. Randolph, with one howitzer to join him, and Lieut. Col. Lee, 1st Regiment North Carolina Volunteers, requested and was granted permission to take command of the whole. After a march of five miles, they came across the marauders, busy over the spoils of a plundered house. A shell soon put the plunderers to flight, and they were chased over New Market Bridge, where our little force was halted in consequence of the presence of a considerable body stationed on the other side. Lieut. Col. Lee brought in one prisoner. How many of the enemy were killed and wounded is not known. None of our command was hurt. Soon after Lieut. Col. Lee left,

a citizen came dashing in with the information that 75 marauders were on the Back River road. I called for Capt. McDowell's Company E, of the 1st Regiment North Carolina Volunteers, and in three minutes, it was in hot pursuit. Lieut. West, of the Howitzer Battalion, with one piece, was detached to join them, and Maj. Lane, of my regiment, volunteered to assume command of the whole. After a weary march, they encountered, dispersed and chased the wretches over New Market bridge—this being the second race on the same day over the New Market course, in both of which the Yankees reached the goal first. Major Lane brought in one prisoner. Reliable citizens reported that two cart loads and one buggy load of wounded were brought into Hampton. We had not a single man killed or wounded. Col. Magruder came up that evening and assumed command.

On Sunday the ninth, a fresh supply of tools enabled us to put more men to work, and when not engaged in religious duties, the men worked vigorously on the entrenchments. We were aroused at 3 o'clock on Monday morning, for a general advance upon the enemy, and marched $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles, when we learned that the foe in large force was within a few hundred yards of us. We fell back hastily upon our entrenchments, and awaited the arrival of our invaders. Lieut. Col. Stewart, of the 3d Va. Regiment, having joined us with some 180 men, was stationed on the hill on the extreme right, beyond the creek, and company G, of my Regiment, was also thrown over the stream to protect the Howitzer under Capt. Brown. Capt. Bridgers, of company A, 1st N. C. regiment, took post in the dense wood beyond and to the left of the bridge. Maj. Montague, with three companies of his battalion, was ordered up from the rear, and took post on our right, beginning at the Church and extending along the entire front on that side. This fine body of men, and the gallant command of Lieut. Col. Stewart, worked with great rapidity, and in an hour had constructed temporary shelters against the enemy's fire. Just at 9 o'clock, A. M., the heavy columns of the enemy were seen approaching rapidly and

in good order, but when Randolph opened upon them at 9 $\frac{1}{4}$, their organization was completely broken up. The enemy promptly replied with his Artillery, firing briskly and wildly. He made an attempt at deployment on our right of the road, under cover of some houses and a paling. They were, however, promptly driven back by our Artillery, a Virginia company, (the Life Guards,) and companies B, C, and G, of my Regiment. *The enemy made no deployment within musketry range during the day, except under cover of woods, fences or palings.* Under cover of the trees, he moved a strong column to an old ford some $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile below where I had placed a picket of some 40 men. Col. Magruder sent Capt. Worth's company, of Montague's command, with one howitzer under Sergeant Crane, to drive back this column, which was done by a single shot from the howitzer. Before this, a priming wire had been broken in the vent of the howitzer commanded by Capt. Brown, and rendered it useless. A force estimated at 1500 was now attempting to outflank us and get in the rear of Lieut. Col. Stewart's small command. He was accordingly directed to fall back, and the whole of our advanced troops were withdrawn. At this critical moment, I directed Lieut. Col. Lee to call Capt. Bridgers out of the swamp and order him to re-occupy the nearest advanced work, and I ordered Capt. Ross' company, 1st Regiment N. C. Volunteers, to the support of Lieut. Col. Stewart. These two Captains, with their companies, crossed over to Randolph's battery under a most heavy fire, in the most gallant manner. As Lieut. Col. Stewart had withdrawn, Capt. Ross was detained at the Church near Randolph's battery. Capt. Bridgers, however, crossed over and drove the Zouaves out of the advanced Howitzer Battery and re-occupied it. It is impossible to over-estimate this service. It decided the action in our favor. In obedience to orders from Col. Magruder, Lieut. Col. Stewart rushed back, and spite of the presence of a foe ten times his superior in numbers, resumed, in the most heroic manner, possession of his entrenchments. A fresh howitzer was carried across and placed in the Battery.

and Capt. Avery, of Company G, was directed to defend it at all hazards. We were now as secure as at the beginning of the fight, and as yet had no man killed. The enemy, finding himself foiled on our right flank, next made his final demonstration on our left. A strong column, supposed to consist of volunteers from different regiments, and under command of Capt. Winthrop, Aid-de-camp to Gen. Butler, crossed over the creek and appeared at the angle on our left. Those in advance had put on our distinctive badge of a white band around the cap, and they cried out repeatedly, "don't fire." This ruse was practised to enable the whole column to get over the creek and form in good order. They now began to cheer most lustily, thinking that our work was open at the gorge and that they could get in by a sudden rush. Companies B and C, however, soon dispelled the illusion by a cool, deliberate and well directed fire. Col. Magruder sent over portions of G, C and H companies of my regiment to our support. And now began as cool firing on our side as ever was witnessed.

The three field officers of the regiment were present, and but few shots were fired without their permission, the men repeatedly saying, "may I fire, I think I can bring him." They were all in high glee, and seemed to enjoy it as much as boys do rabbit shooting. Capt. Winthrop, while most gallantly urging on his men, was shot through the heart, when all rushed back with the utmost precipitation. So far as my observation extended, he was the only one of the enemy who exhibited even an approximation to courage during the day. The fight at the angle lasted but twenty minutes; it completely discouraged the enemy, and he made no further effort at assault. The house, in front, which had served as a hiding place for the enemy, was now fired by a shell from a Howitzer, and the outhouses and palings were soon in a blaze. As all shelter was now taken from him, the enemy called in his troops and started back for Hampton. As he had left sharp shooters behind him in the woods on our left, the dragoons could not advance until Capt. Hoke,

of Company K, 1st Regiment North Carolina Volunteers, had thoroughly explored them. When he gave the assurance of the wood being clear, Capt. Douthatt, with some 100 Dragoons, pursued. The enemy, in his haste, threw away hundreds of canteens, haversacks, overcoats, &c.; even the dead were thrown out of the wagons. The pursuit soon became a chase, and for the third time the enemy won the race over the New Market course. The bridge was torn up behind him, and our dragoons returned to camp.

There were not quite 800 of my regiment engaged in the fight, and not one-half of these drew a trigger during the fight. All remained manfully at the post assigned, and not a man in the regiment behaved badly. The companies not engaged were as much exposed and rendered equal services with those participating in the fight. They deserve equally the thanks of the country. In fact it is the most trying ordeal to which soldiers can be subjected to receive a fire which their orders forbid them to return. Had a single company left its post, our works would have been exposed. And the constancy and discipline of the unengaged companies cannot be too highly commended.

A detachment of fifteen cadets of the N. C. Military Institute defended the Howitzer under Lt. Hudnell, and acted with great coolness and determination.

I cannot speak in too high terms of my two field officers, Lt. Col. Lee and Maj. Lane. Their services have been of the highest importance since taking the field to the present moment.— My thanks are due in an especial manner to Lieut. J. M. Poteat, Adjutant, and Lieut. J. W. Ratchford, Aid, both of them Cadets of the N. C. Military Institute, at Charlotte. The latter received a contusion in the forehead from a grape-shot, which nearly cost him his life.

Capt. Bridgers, Company A; Lieut. Owens, commanding company B; Capt. Ross, company C; Capt. Ashe, company D; Capt. McDowell, company E; Capt. Starr, company F; Capt. Avery, company G; Capt. Huske, company H; Lieut. Whitaker, commanding company I; and Capt. Hoke, company K; displayed great coolness, judgment and efficiency. Lieut. Greg-

ory is highly spoken of by Maj. Lane for soldierly bearing on the 8th. Lieuts. Cook and McKethan, company H, crossed over under a heavy fire to the assistance of the troops attached on the left, so also did Lieut. Cohen, company C. Lieut. Hoke has shown great zeal, energy and judgment as an engineer officer on various occasions.

Corporal Geo. Williams, company A; privates Henry L. Wyatt, Thomas Fallan, John Thorpe, company A, volunteered to burn the house which concealed the enemy. They behaved with great gallantry. Wyatt was killed and the other three were recalled.

Sergeant Thomas J. Stewart, company A, and private Wm. McDowell, company A, reconnoitered the position of the enemy, and went far in advance of our troops. Private J. W. Potts, of company B, is especially mentioned by his company commander. So are C. L. Watt, company C; W. H. McDade, company D; Sergeant J. M. Young, company E; Corporal John Dingle, company E; privates G. H. A. Adams, company E; R. V. Gudger, company E; G. W. Worley, company E; John C. Weight, company E; T. T. Little, company E; J. F. Jenkins, company E; R. W. Steadman, company F; M. E. Dye, company F; H. E. Benton, company F; J. B. Smith, company F; G. W. Buham, company H; James C. McRae, company H.

CASUALTIES.

Private Henry L. Wyatt, company A, mortally wounded; Lt. J. W. Ratchford, contusion; privates Council Rodgers, and Chas. Williams, company A, wounded severely; private S. Patterson, company D, slightly wounded; private William White, company K, wounded; private Peter Poteat, company G, slightly wounded.

I cannot close this too elaborate report without speaking in the highest terms of admiration of the Howitzer Battalion, and its most accomplished commander, Maj. Randolph. He has no superior as an artillerist in any country, and his men displayed the utmost skill and coolness. The left Howitzer, under Lieut. Hudnell, being nearest my works, came under my special notice.

The names of those at it are as follows :

Lieut. Hudnell, commanding, wounded; Sergeant S. B. Hughes, S. H. Pendleton, R. B. Pleasants, W. M. Caldwell, G. W. Hobson, Wm. McCarthy, H. C. Shook, wounded; L. W. Timberlake, G. P. Hughes, John Worth, wounded; D. B. Clark.

Permit me, in conclusion, to pay a well deserved compliment to the first Regiment N. C. Volunteers. Their patience under trial, perseverance under toil, and courage under fire, have seldom been surpassed by veteran troops. After working night and day, sometimes without tents and cooking utensils, a murmur has never escaped them to my knowledge. They have done a large portion of the work on the intrenchments at Yorktown, as well as those at Bethel. Had all the Regiments in the field worked with the same spirit, there would not be an assailable point in Virginia. After the battle they shook hands affectionately with the spades, calling them clever fellows and good friends. The men are influenced by high moral and religious sentiments; and their conduct has furnished another example of the great truth, that he who fears God will ever do his duty to his country.

The Confederates had in all about 1200 men in the action.—The enemy had the regiments of Col. Duryea (Zouaves) Col. Carr, Col. Allen, Col. Benedick and Col. Wardrop, (Massachusetts) from Old Point Comfort, and five companies of Phelps, Regiment from Newport News. We had never more than 300 actively engaged at any one time. The Confederate loss was 11 wounded; of those, one mortally. The enemy must have lost some 300. I could not, without great disparagement of their courage, place their loss at a lower figure. It is inconceivable that 5000 men should make so precipitate a retreat without having sustained at least this much of a reverse.

Let us devoutly thank the living God for his wonderful interposition in our favor, and evince our gratitude by the exemplariness of our lives.

D. H. HILL,
Col., 1st. Reg. N. C. V's.

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