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CHAPTER XI. THE FIRST BRIGADE

Organization of the Vermont brigade—Its first commander, General Brooks—Winter at Camp Griffin—Remarkable period of sickness — Opening of the Spring campaign of 1862—Movement to Fortress Monroe—The Baptism of blood at Lee's Mill—Incidents of the action—Care of the wounded—The battle of Williamsburg—Fighting of Smith's division—March to the White House on the Pamunkey.

The only brigade in the Army of the Potomac, distinctively and permanently known by the name of its State, was the First Vermont brigade. The title of "The Vermont Brigade" attached to it chiefly, no doubt, because during most of its history it was the only Vermont brigade; but perhaps also in part because the Vermonters were recognized as good fighters and because the men of this brigade illustrated the qualities which gave to their ancestors their distinctive title of "Green Mountain Boys" in the War of the Revolution.

The first suggestion of the formation of a brigade of Vermont regiments was made by General William F. Smith in the fall of 1861. Up to that time, and for some time after, it was not the policy of the government to brigade regiments of the same State together, the theory of the army authorities being that losses falling on brigades would be less felt if distributed over several States and that rivalry between regiments of different States in the same brigade would conduce to the efficiency of all. General Smith was allowed, however, by General McClellan, to organize his Vermont brigade; and the success of the experiment was complete, as it was in the

case of the similar State brigades of Wisconsin, Michigan, New York, New Jersey and other troops.

In General McClellan's report of the organization of the Army of the Potomac, October 15th, 1861, the Vermont regiments appear as constituting the first¹ brigade of General Smith's division, the other brigades of that division being Stevens's, Hancock's and Casey's. The brigade at that date consisted of the Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Vermont regiments, then encamped between Chain Bridge and Lewinsville. The brigade was completed by the arrival of the Sixth, October 24; and Captain and Bvt. Major W. T. H. Brooks, of the Third infantry, U.S.A., who had been serving on General McClellan's staff and had just been appointed brigadier general of volunteers, was assigned to its command. He was of Vermont lineage, his father having been a native of Montpelier. He was born in Ohio, and appointed from that State to the U.S. Military Academy, from which he graduated in 1841, in the class of which Don Carlos Buell, John. F. Reynolds, and other prominent general officers, were members. He had seen active service in the Mexican war, and on the frontier, and had established his reputation as a brave, experienced and capable soldier. As was the case with most officers of the regular army at that time, he had little sympathy with the anti-slavery sentiment which animated the soldiers and people of Vermont, and gave no welcome to an "abolition war;" but he proposed to do his duty to the government and to the flag he had sworn to serve; and if the brigade which he commanded for a year and a half had a noteworthy share in the overthrow of the Rebellion, it was due in large part to the thorough training and soldierly example of its first brigade commander. General Brooks was in his forty-second year, tall and erect of figure, unostentatious and soldierly in bearing, and from the first

¹ First, that is, in order. The brigades were not then formally numbered

made a favorable impression on his command, which strengthened with time and better knowledge.

Camp Griffin, the camp of the brigade for five months, and for a longer period than was spent by it in any other spot, always had a distinct place in the memory of the Vermonters who there saw their first campaigning. It was in a fine rolling country, of varied open fields and magnificent woodlands, many acres of which fell under the axes of the Vermont boys. The knolls around had been dotted with mansions, many of which were already in ruins under the ruthless touch of war. The soil was the red Virginia clay, so unlike that of New England. The camp was on the road from Chain Bridge to Lewinsville, a mile and a half from the latter hamlet, and on and around Smoot's Hill, from the top of which the camps of most of the twenty-five regiments and batteries of General Smith's division could be seen covering the country round, a part of the constantly increasing army, which stretched for five miles up and down the Potomac in front of Washington. The Confederate outposts were five or six miles away, and the mass of the Confederate army, under General Joe Johnston, lay at Centreville and Manassas, fifteen miles to the southwest.

The thing which chiefly gave the brigade distinction during the fall of 1861, was the extraordinary amount of sickness which prevailed in the regiments. This began to be remarkable in November, and soon attracted anxious attention in Vermont, and wide notice throughout the army. On the 12th of December, Dr. Edward E. Phelps, one of the foremost physicians in Vermont, who had been sent by the governor to investigate the subject on the ground, reported that of the men of the five regiments, numbering 4,939 on the ground, no less than 1,086, or about one-fourth, were excused from duty in consequence of sickness. Of these, 221 were sick in hospital, 245 sick in their tents, and 550 able to be up and about though unfit for duty. The prevailing dis-

eases were remittent and intermittent fevers, typhoid pneumonia, and diarrhoea. The only cause Dr. Phelps could assign for this condition of things, was that the regiments had been too long stationary in their camps, on soil which had become saturated with noxious elements. But why these conditions affected the Vermonters, above all others similarly situated, was not explained.

In the general report of the Medical Director of the Army of the Potomac, Surgeon Charles S. Tripler, upon the sanitary condition of the army from March, 1861, to August, 1862, he said: "In November, 1861, with a mean ratio of 6.5 per cent. sick in the whole army, twelve Massachusetts regiments gave an average of 50 sick each; five Vermont, an average of 144 each; and thirty-five Pennsylvania, an average of 61 each. In January, 1862, the Twelfth Massachusetts, 1,005 strong, had but four sick; the Thirteenth, 1,003 strong, but 11; while the Fifteenth, 809 strong had 68. In the same month the Fifth Vermont, 1,000 strong, had 271 sick; the Fourth, 1,047 strong, had 244 sick; while the Second, 1,021 strong, had but 87, and the Third, 900 strong, had but 84. All these regiments were in the same brigade and encamped side by side." Among the causes of disease, Surgeon Tripler mentioned severe fatigue duty on the field works, exposure on picket duty, and frequent alarms in some portions of the lines. This last cause, he says, "was particularly the case in front of some of the Vermont troops in Brook's brigade," and he thinks it may have had an unfavorable effect on men predisposed to disease from other causes. If so, it was not, however, because the Vermonters scared easily. The night alarms which deprived them of needed rest, came invariably from the other troops around them.

In a special report of January 28th, 1862, Medical Director Tripler says: "The Vermont "regiments in Brooks's brigade give us the largest ratio of sick, of all the troops in

this army, and “that ratio has not essentially varied for the last three months. They suffered in the first place “from measles. In this they simply shared the lot of all irregular troops. Since then they have “been and are the subjects of fevers, remittent and typhoid. The inspector of hospitals (Surgeon Keeney) reports the police² of all these regiments as good, their clothing good, their tents good, “with the exception of the Second and Third regiments, and, strange to say, those two regiments “are in decidedly the best sanitary condition. The locations of the camps of the Fifth and Sixth are reported as bad, but that of the Third is also bad. * * * While writing I have received another weekly report from the Vermont brigade, which shows a large increase of sick over that of the “preceding week. * * * The food of our men is now good and they are gradually improving in their cooking. The clothing of the men is generally good. I do not think any deficiency in this respect has anything to do with the fevers that scourge our Vermont troops. * * * I believe there “is a nostalgic element in those regiments affecting them unfavorably.”

On the 6th of February, 1862, Surgeon Tripler reported that he had sent a large detachment of convalescents to Philadelphia, in order to make room for the sick of the Vermont brigade in the general hospitals, “in hopes that some beneficial effect might result to the well from removing the sick from their sight, and thus avoiding the depressing influence of so much sickness among their comrades.” Among the other special measures taken by the State and government authorities to care for the sick, five additional assistant surgeons were detailed for service in the brigade;³ log houses

² Unmilitary readers will understand that this term in the army has sole reference to cleanliness. To “police” a camp is to clear it of dirt and noxious deposits,

³ Three of them — Asst. Surgeons Porter, Phillips, and D. W. Hazelton, were sent out by the governor, and two, Asst. Surgeons Shaw and Goodwin by the U. S. surgeon general.

were substituted for hospital tents, care was taken by the regimental officers to remove causes of disease from the camps, and deficiencies in clothing were supplied. These means and precautions had their effect, and as the winter drew to a close the health of the regiments improved, and the spirits of the men, who had been much depressed by the mortality in the ranks, rose correspondingly.

The work of the winter was drill—though the deep mud in January and February made necessary a suspension of battalion and brigade drills—; picket duty, each regiment taking its turn on picket once in five days; and fatigue duty on the forts near the camps. The officers generally built comfortable log cabins for their quarters, and many of them had their wives with them in camp. The picket duty, in the cold rains and frequent storms of snow and sleet, was severe, but not very dangerous, one man (of the Second regiment) killed on picket being the extent of the casualties. The occasional reconnoissances, heretofore described in the regimental histories, afforded excitement for the time being. Contrabands frequently came into the lines and always found a safe refuge in the camps. One night in February, twenty-seven colored fugitives came in, were fed, and sent to Washington by General Brooks.

During the last half of February the weather became much milder. The mud dried so that battalion drills were resumed; and Washington's birthday was celebrated by a brigade dress parade. The cheerful news of the captures of Forts Henry and Donelson, received about this time, raised the spirits of all: the desire to be led against the enemy became strong among the troops, and by none was the prospect of active operations more eagerly welcomed than by the Vermonters.

In the organization, in March, 1862, of the vast army with which McClellan was now about to take the field, Brooks's Vermont brigade formed a part of General Wm. F. Smith's

division of the Fourth Corps, General Keyes. The division was one of the best in the army. Its commander, General "Baldy" Smith, was recognized as one of the most valuable officers in the service; its three brigade commanders, Generals Hancock, Brooks and Davidson, were trained soldiers who subsequently won high distinction; and their brigades comprised the Thirty-third and Forty-ninth New York, Seventh Maine, Fifth Wisconsin, and others subsequently famous as fighting regiments. Four light batteries, Ayres's, Mott's, Wheeler's and Kennedy's were attached to the division.

At midnight on the 9th of March came the order to have two days' rations cooked and to march at 3 o'clock in the morning. It was received with cheers and rejoicing throughout the brigade. Bonfires of combustibles which the men could not carry and would rather burn than leave, began to blaze in the company streets. The packing of knapsacks, writing letters to friends at home and other preparations occupied the short hours of the night; and before dawn the brigade was marshaled, with the division, on the open plain. At sunrise it moved off through Lewinsville and past Vienna, to the southwest, the men not doubting that they were to meet the enemy, perhaps on the plains of Manassas; and rejoicing with an eagerness which the drizzling rain could not dampen, in the prospect of an opportunity to wipe out, on the same field, the disgrace of Bull run, and to end the war in a great pitched battle. The troops marched for the most part through the fields, the roads being left to the long trains of army wagons; and the march presented to the men the striking sights and scenes, new to most of them, which mark the movement of a great army. Shortly after noon the brigade halted at Flint hill, north of Fairfax Court House. It remained halted during the afternoon. Something evidently had arrested the movement of that division, and toward night came the explanation, in a whispered rumor that there

was no enemy to be attacked. The night was spent under shelter-tents⁴ — the first experience of the men under such scanty shelter. Next morning the rumor was confirmed, and it became known that General Joe Johnston—who, with an army which at no time numbered fifty thousand men for duty, had for six months kept the Confederate flag flying within sight of the National capital—had now, at his own time and on his own motion, evacuated Centreville, and taking with him his guns and material, had retired beyond the Rappahannock. General McClellan had ably organized an army of 175,000 men; had instilled into it absolute confidence in himself; had communicated to it with a few exceptions⁵ his own delusion that the rebel army in front of Washington exceeded a hundred thousand men; had held them inactive during precious weeks, some of them quite favorable for military movements—and this against constant pressure and even orders to move from the President — and now found himself confronted, not by a powerful enemy but by empty camps and a new situation.

The brigade remained at Flint Hill for four days, during which McClellan and his generals were maturing plans for a change of base and campaign against Richmond by way of the Peninsula between the York and James Rivers.

On the 12th the division was reviewed by General McClellan.

On Saturday the 15th, in a drenching rain, the brigade moved with the division to Alexandria — a march of over

⁴ Strips of cotton cloth, two of which, buttoned together, made a low shelter for two men. The tents occupied by the brigade during the winter had been left standing at Camp Griffin.

⁵ General Wadsworth, who was stationed near Ball's Cross roads, told Mr. Greeley, in January, that the testimony of numerous deserters had satisfied him that the rebels had "but fifty or sixty regiments — certainly not over 50,000 men." General Johnston's aggregate present for duty in February was 47,806. General McClellan's aggregate present for duty at that time was 150,000.

twenty miles by the route taken and the hardest march, the men (except those of the Second) had experienced. The transports were not ready, and on Monday the brigade marched back four miles to Cloud's Mills, where it remained for a week. On Sunday, March 23d, it marched to Alexandria again and embarked. The spirits of the men were high, and the moving of the division, of 13,000 men, with bands playing and colors flying, on board of the large steamers waiting with steam up to take them to some destination as yet unknown but concerning which it was enough to know that it was some point in the South, where they would meet the enemy — was an imposing spectacle and not soon forgotten by those who witnessed it.

The fleet of transports bearing the Fourth Corps anchored for the night opposite Mount Vernon and next day steamed down the Potomac and Chesapeake Bay, past shores of historic interest, now first seen by most of the Vermonters, and arrived off Fortress Monroe during the night. The next morning's light presented to their wondering gaze the frowning battlements of Fortress Monroe; the little Monitor, already world-famous from her encounter with the Merrimac two weeks before;⁶ the waters of Hampton Roads, black with steamers, ships of war and craft of all sizes, by hundreds, and the beach and shores covered with masses of infantry, trains of artillery and lines of army wagons. The brigade debarked, and at 10 A. M. took up its line of march past the fort, across the Hampton River, past the naked chimneys and charred ruins of what was once the ancient and beautiful village of Hampton, and out three or four miles toward Newport News, over ground familiar to those who had been

⁶ It may be noted here, that John F. Winslow, one of the two men who backed Ericsson with money and powerful influence, secured the contract for the Monitor from the government, and crowded the work of construction to completion in a hundred and one days, was a native Vermonter, born in Bennington.

members of the First Vermont, halting and camping in the grain fields and pine groves of a plantation near the banks of the James River. Here it remained for two days.

The army taken by General McClellan to the Peninsula and now gathering in bivouacs on the roads leading out from Hampton, consisted of the Second Corps, General Sumner; the Third, General Heintzelman, and the Fourth, General Keyes — comprising eight divisions, each from 12,000 to 15,000 strong, and 31 batteries; and forming, with the reserve artillery, cavalry, and regulars, an army of about 120,000 men and 44 batteries. Of the two corps left behind, the Fifth, General Banks, was for immediate protection of Washington; while the First, General McDowell, was expected by General McClellan — though his expectation was disappointed — to cooperate with the main army by a movement from the right bank of the York River. As the troops landed on the Peninsula and moved out into the open country, they were arranged in two columns, one of which was to march on the right direct to Yorktown, and the other to move on the left along the James River by way of Warwick Court House to Williamsburg. General Smith's division headed the second column.

Before the army moved as a whole, strong reconnoissances were pushed up the Peninsula from each column. That on the west side of the Peninsula was conducted by Smith's division, and that on the east by Fitz John Porter's. These started at sunrise on the 17th, marching over the same road for five miles, and then diverging, Smith's division bore to the left toward Warwick Court House, and Porter's towards Big Bethel. The day was fine, the roads dry, and the country delightful. Rows of locust trees lined the roads, rich groves of oak and peach orchards in full bloom diversified the scene, and the long lines of troops, extending for miles, their muskets glittering in the sunlight, made an inspiring spectacle.

After a march of about ten miles, Hancock's brigade,

which was leading the division, came upon the enemy's pickets near Deep Creek. Smith halted, and prepared to encounter the enemy, supposed to be in force. The fences were leveled, and artillery thrown into battery. The Vermont brigade was deployed in front of the woods through which the Confederate pickets had disappeared. The right wing of the Second regiment, under Colonel Whiting, was sent by General Brooks a mile to the right to hold the road towards Big Bethel; and the left wing under Lieut. Colonel Stannard was thrown forward as skirmishers.⁷ But as after advancing for a mile no enemy was found, the brigade was halted, marched back a mile and bivouacked for the night. Next day the division returned down the Peninsula and the brigade went into camp about two miles above Newport News. Here it remained a week, during which time some heavy rains set the camps afloat. The weather, however, was warm and the men made ample use of their opportunities for bathing in the river, and feasting on Virginia oysters, gathered from the shoals. The events of the week were the appearance, on the 31st, of the Confederate gunboat *Teazer*, which came down from Richmond and threw several shells into the camps, and a grand review by General Keyes.

By the 2d of April, five divisions of the army, making, with the artillery reserve, fifty-eight thousand men and one hundred guns, had arrived; and on the 4th, the grand advance up the Peninsula began.

The army moved in two columns, General Keyes's corps on the left, with Smith's division in advance. The day was clear and warm, and the roadsides were soon strewn with discarded blankets and superfluous clothing. A march of ten miles to the north brought the division to Young's Mills, and

⁷ About this time, the First U. S. Sharpshooters, under Lieut. Colonel W. Y. W. Ripley, which led the advance of Porter's division, was engaged with the Confederate outpost at Big Bethel. As that regiment comprised a Vermont company, Vermonters were at the front of both columns.

in front of some apparently formidable earthworks crowning the crest of a hill, the approach to which was in part barred by a mill pond and obstructed by felled trees. The Vermont brigade was ordered forward and moved upon and entered the works, to find them tenantless, the only hostile force seen being a cavalry picket, which exchanged shots with the skirmishers by one of which a private of the Fifth Vermont was wounded in the shoulder. An orderly sergeant of the Second Virginia who had straggled from his regiment was captured here by some men of the Third Vermont. The enemy had been there in force the night previous, and his camp fires were still burning. The brigade camped in and about the earthworks and some extensive barracks near it.⁸ Next morning it resumed the march in a violent thunder storm. Warwick Court House, consisting of a dilapidated brick court house and jail, a store and two dwellings, was passed about noon. Three miles further brought the division to a standstill, at the Warwick River, at Lee's Mill — a name memorable in the history of the campaign and of the brigade, and sadly remembered by many a Vermont widow and orphan. The advance of the division had here come upon the enemy, and found him evidently disposed to dispute the passage of the river. The stream showed a considerable stretch of water, fringed with swamps, and beyond it were formidable earthworks. The Confederate pickets, instead of retreating heretofore, now held their ground on the opposite shore and fired viciously at everything within and beyond range; hostile artillery opened with 12-pound shells upon any body of troops that came in sight of them, and wounded men began to be taken to the rear. A battery was ordered forward and returned the fire; and the division and the corps stopped to consider. Meanwhile, Fitz John

⁸ "The enemy's works at Young's Mill are so strong that with 5,000 men he might have stopped my two divisions there a week." — General Keyes's Report.

Porter's division was in like manner brought to a stand in front of Yorktown; and the grand advance became a grand halt of the army.

The barrier before McClellan's army was the Warwick river, which rises within a mile of Yorktown and runs across the Peninsula to the James, and a formidable line of redoubts and breastworks along its right, or western bank, which the Confederate General Magruder had been for two months industriously constructing, in part by the labor of 1,000 slaves. The Warwick road, over which General Keyes's column was marching up the Peninsula, crossed the river by a bridge at Lee's Mill. Below that point the river was deep and wide enough, and its borders sufficiently swampy, to be practically impassable. Above Lee's Mill it ran for miles through forests thickest on the eastern bank. It had been previously dammed for water-power at Lee's Mill and at Wynn's Mill, three miles above, and between these points Magruder had built three additional dams, for military purposes. The dams were guarded by redoubts, and the redoubts connected by a double and in some places a treble line of breastworks. Magruder's force on the 5th of April was 11,000 men, of whom 6,000 were stationed at Yorktown and at Gloucester Point, across the York river, leaving but 5,000 for manning the eight or nine miles of works along the line of Warwick River. The obstruction was undoubtedly a serious one; but if General Keyes had at once, or within two or three days, made a serious effort to push through the line, few can doubt that he would have done it with comparative ease, and that the result would have been the evacuation of Yorktown and of the Peninsula by the enemy. But the Warwick River line was a wholly unexpected obstacle to the Union generals, whose want of information concerning the defences of Yorktown was as remarkable as their misconception of the strength of their opponents. It disarranged McClellan's calculations, and he characteristically preferred to wait, rather than to

strike.⁹ President Lincoln urged him, April 6th, to “break the enemy's line at once;” but General McClellan replied that he was convinced that the great battle that was to decide the existing contest was to be fought there, and that he would commence the attack as soon as he could get up his siege train, and have McDowell's corps for a flank movement from York river. With an opponent of this temper, Magruder's bold front answered every purpose, and the Union army, with five men on the ground for every man opposed to them, sat down to wait for siege guns and reinforcements.

In the deployment of General Smith's division along the Warwick River, the Vermont brigade was sent to the right of the Warwick road through the woods and swamps. The men slept on their arms that night, well to the front, and those were fortunate who found a dry place to sit or lie on. General Smith bivouacked at the foot of a pine tree, near the line of his division. Some buildings near the fort in front, across the river, took fire and burned brightly during a good part of the night; and there was little sleep in the ranks. Before dawn the men could hear distinctly the reveille in the enemy's camps; and some of the pickets could even distinguish the roll calls of the Confederate companies. During the next day, Sunday, April 6th, the skirmishers were blazing away at each other, the Confederates in rifle pits and the Federals in the edge of the woods, and occasional shots from the Confederate artillery crashed through the tree tops over the heads of the troops; but no Vermonters were hurt. Fatigue duty, in corduroying roads over the spongy soil, in which water was found anywhere at the depth of a foot or two and on which it was well nigh impossible to move artillery, now began and formed a good share of the work of the army for weeks. On Monday the brigade, having been under arms for two days and nights, was moved to the rear and

⁹ “To my utter surprise he (McClellan) permitted day after day to elapse without an assault.” General Magruder, in his report.

right to a position near the Garrow farm. Here they remained encamped in the woods, with a few unimportant changes of position, for a month, doing their share of picket service¹⁰ and fatigue duty in building roads and batteries, and doing also the first serious fighting of the Peninsular campaign on the Union side.

LEE'S MILL.

The engagement known as that of Lee's Mill, was a notable one, as being the first assault on an entrenched line made by the Army of the Potomac, as an exhibition of remarkable bravery in the troops engaged, and as one of the bloodiest actions, in proportion to numbers engaged, in which the Vermont troops took part during the war. It was also one of the most useless wastes of life and most lamentable of unimproved opportunities recorded in this history.

The scene of the action was the Garrow farm, about half way between Lee's Mill and Wynn's Mill. Here an extensive cleared field opened from the highway leading to Yorktown to the river, bordered by woods on the right and left and rear. In the center of this open ground stood the three chimneys of Mrs. Garrow's house, which had been burned by

¹⁰ The pickets on the opposite sides of the river were at some points within speaking distance of each other, keeping themselves sheltered by stumps and trees, and sharp words as well as bullets often passed between them. The author of "Three Years in the Sixth Corps," tells the following incident of this time: "A good deal of hard talk had passed between one of our pickets and one of the 'Johnnies.' Finally the rebel thrust his hand beyond his tree, holding in it a bottle; and shaking it challenged the Yankee to come and take it. Crack went the Yankee's rifle at the hand. 'Ha, ha, why don't you hit it?' Say, what do you think of Bull Run?' 'How do you like Fort Donelson?' responded the Yankee. While this colloquy was going on, a Yankee number two crept around behind a log, and drawing on the Southerner blazed away at him. The son of chivalry clapped his hand to his shoulder and ran off howling. 'There, you fool; shouted Yankee number one, 'I told you that blind man would be shooting you, pretty soon.'"

Magruder two weeks before, and the engagement is known in some of the earlier accounts as that of “the Burned Chimneys.” From a low ridge through the centre of the opening, the ground descended by an easy slope to the sluggish stream of Warwick River, running through low and marshy ground. At this point Magruder had built one of his dams, styled in the Confederate reports “Dam No. 1.” It formed a narrow causeway across the stream and morass, setting back the water for a considerable distance, and was guarded by extensive entrenchments. Below the dam and near the river's edge, on the right bank, ran a line of deep rifle pits. At the northern end of the dam was an earthwork, armed with a 24 pound howitzer, described in General Smith's reports as “the one gun battery.” Two hundred yards to the rear of this was a redoubt and epaulement, with two guns, a twelve and a six pounder, of the Troop artillery, attached to General Howell Cobb's command. From the front of this redoubt to the river the ground had been cleared; but woods extended behind and on each side of the works. During the week preceding the 15th of April, large numbers of men were seen strengthening the works, and building breastworks to the right and left of them.

General McClellan did not like this; and before daylight on the morning of April 16th an order was despatched by General Keyes, directing the latter to “stop the enemy's working” at that point.¹¹ General Keyes passed this order along to General Smith, who made extensive dispositions for the purpose. He decided to use some of his Vermont troops to drive away the working parties, with Mott's (Third New York) battery. Hancock's brigade, with Ayres's and Wheeler's batteries, he stationed along the road to Lee's Mill; and he held Davidson's brigade in reserve at “the Four Corners” in the rear.

¹¹ General Keyes's report.

The Vermont regiments moved to the scene of action at six o'clock in the morning, General Smith accompanying General Brooks and directing the dispositions of the troops. General Brooks sent forward the Third Vermont, Colonel Hyde, through the woods on the lower side of the opening, and the Fourth Vermont, Colonel Stoughton, through the woods on the upper or eastern side, with orders to throw out skirmishers to the water's edge below and above the dam, and open fire on any working parties of the enemy in sight about their works. Mott's battery was posted in the edge of the woods along the road in the rear of the field, supported by the other Vermont regiments, held in reserve a short distance farther to the rear. The Fourth regiment was the first to get position. It halted a few rods from the river in the woods, and Companies B. and G. were deployed as skirmishers and advanced to the swampy edge of the pond above the dam, keeping themselves covered by the bushes. It was now about half past seven o'clock, and guard-mounting was in progress behind the works across the creek, to the tune of "Rosa Lee." Colonel Stoughton accompanied the skirmishers and opened the ball by taking a musket from a man and firing it into the nearest embrasure. This action was followed by his men, and the enemy returned the fire with artillery, the first shell passing over the line of the Fourth, and striking a pine tree under which Surgeon Child and Chaplain Plympton were sitting, cutting off its top and covering them with fragments of bark.

A section of Mott's battery at once went into the open ground and replied vigorously. In the meantime the Third had got into position on the left of the field. Having a longer front to cover, six companies were deployed by Colonel Hyde as skirmishers, and advanced to the edge of the morass. The skirmishers, with such protection as they could get from logs and stumps, opened fire briskly on the enemy in the rifle pits across the creek, and received a sharp

return, by which several men of the Third were wounded. During the hour which followed a sensible diminution of the enemy's musketry fire was noticed; but his artillery was still actively served from the upper earthworks. A shell struck the wheel of one of Mott's pieces, and exploding killed three of the cannoneers and wounded more. About this time Colonel Smalley of the Fifth regiment was ordered to send a detachment, composed of the best marksmen in his command, to the river front, whence the enemy's guns could be reached at shorter range. For this duty ten of the best shots in each company were selected, making, with the non-commissioned officers who accompanied them, a company of 65 men. Captain Dudley of Company E was placed in command, assisted by Lieutenant Spaulding. The detachment, deployed at five paces, marched down through the open field, having two men wounded by fragments of shells as they started. After passing the chimneys they received a musketry volley from the rifle pits across the creek. Dropping to the ground they crept on down the slope to the edge, and securing shelter behind inequalities in the ground opened a galling fire on the Confederate artillerymen, and on any of the enemy who showed themselves above the rifle pits. During the forenoon the 24-pounder near the end of the dam was disabled by a shot from one of Mott's guns. The other rebel guns were kept silent by the sharpshooters. The enemy's musketry fire ceased with the exception of an occasional scattering shot; and General Smith ordered the firing on his side to cease.

The first stage of the action was over. The object indicated by General McClellan had been accomplished for the time being; and the affair, unless a good deal more was to be attempted, might well have ended there. But it was not so to end. General Smith, sweeping the enemy's works with his glass, discovered, as he thought, that the gun in the upper angle of the main redoubt had been replaced by a wooden gun,

and he could perceive hardly any heads above the parapets. About the same time, eleven A. M., Lieutenant E. M. Noyes,¹² aid-de-camp on General Brooks's staff, came to General Brooks to say that he had been reconnoitring on his own hook; had crossed the creek below the dam, finding the water only about waist deep at the deepest; and had been unmolested within 25 or 50 yards of the enemy's works. Furthermore, some wagons had been seen in the rear of his works, a circumstance taken to indicate that he was removing his stores. Altogether it was not doubted that the Confederates were badly demoralized and preparing to vacate their position.

Shortly before noon General McClellan appeared on the ground with an imposing array of staff officers, among whom were the two French princes, the Count de Paris and Prince de Joinville, and held a conference with General Smith.¹³ Lieutenant Noyes was sent for and reported his observations. General McClellan thereupon directed General Smith to occupy the opposing works, but by no means to bring on a general engagement, and to withdraw his troops if serious resistance was encountered. As to details, it was decided, upon General Smith's suggestion, that he should place three batteries in the open ground at the head of the slope to the river, supported by the Vermont brigade in the woods on each flank and by Hancock's brigade in the rear, and that under the fire of the guns a small force should be thrown across the river below the dam to feel of the enemy; and that if the works were found empty or slightly defended, a

¹² First Lieutenant, Co. C., Third Vermont.

¹³ "I heard General Smith ask General McClellan what he had better do — give up the job and go back to camp, or what? General McClellan answered in so low a voice that I did not hear his reply." — Statement of Colonel Whiting.

strong column should be pushed across to effect a permanent lodgment.¹⁴

In carrying out this plan Dudley's skirmishers were withdrawn into the woods on the left, their withdrawal being hastened by a sharp fire from the rebel rifle pits, which indicated with sufficient distinctness that they were still manned. Companies K. and E. of the Fourth relieved Companies B. and G. on the skirmish line above the dam. A skirmish line of men of the Third, under command of Major Seaver, was maintained in the edge of the woods on the river bank below the clearing. The Second regiment was sent into the woods on the right, in the rear of the Fourth, and the Fifth and Sixth regiments were stationed in the woods on the left and rear. Colonel Hyde was directed to send two companies of the Third regiment, to be supported by two more companies, across the river, to assault and drive the enemy out of the nearest rifle pits. If they succeeded in carrying these, they were to announce the fact by cheers and waving a white handkerchief, when more troops were to be sent to support them, and to attack the earthworks beyond. Colonel Hyde took for the attack the four companies, D., F., E. and K., not on duty on the skirmish line, and gave the company commanders their instructions in the presence of General Brooks. Company D., Captain Harrington, and F., Captain Pingree, were to lead, and were formed in line near the river bank. The men were ordered to unclasp their waist belts and hold their cartridge boxes out of the water with one hand, and their rifles with the other. All understood that it was a doubtful, if not desperate undertaking that was before

¹⁴ General McClellan returned to his headquarters to telegraph to Washington, that General Smith had "handsomely silenced the fire of the so-called one-gun battery, and forced the enemy to suspend work." To which Secretary Stanton replied: "Good for the first lick. Hurrah for Smith and the one-gun battery! Let us have Yorktown with Magruder and his gang, before the 1st of May, and the job will be over." But the "job" did not prove to be over.

them; but the duty and its possible consequences were accepted with the stern resolution of brave men, determined to improve to the utmost the first opportunity that had been offered to them to show whether or no the men of the North could stand fire.

About three o'clock, the guns of Mott's, Wheeler's and Kennedy's batteries opened a vigorous cannonade from the crest of the slope. The enemy's artillery responded, but his fire soon slackened under the storm of shot and shell, and the moment arrived for the infantry to advance. Harrington, who was the ranking captain, having announced to Captain Pingree that a physical infirmity from which he was suffering would not permit him to cross the river, Pingree promptly gave the order "Forward!" and led the way. The men pushed across the stream in good shape, though they were under sharp musketry fire from the start and though the bottom was in many places covered with a network of felled trees, over which many tripped and fell, wetting both guns and ammunition. Floundering along in spite of all obstacles, however, the two companies reached the opposite bank, and dashed straight for the rifle pits, driving out of them a force about equal in number to their own.¹⁵ The Confederates beat a hasty retreat to their works beyond, and the Vermonters, cheering loudly, started after them for the next parallel; but they were ordered back by Captain Pingree, whose orders were to occupy the rifle pits and wait there for reinforcements. They accordingly fell back behind the scarp of the captured breastwork; and were soon joined by Companies E. and K., which had followed them at a short interval.

Corporal Hutchinson of Company D., who had been selected to signal the occupancy of the work, by waving a handkerchief attached to his bayonet, had fallen, mortally

¹⁵ The rifle pits were occupied at the time by a picket guard of the Fifteen North Carolina, and a company (Co. D.) of the Sixteenth Georgia.

wounded; but the men shouted lustily back across the stream, handkerchiefs were waved by several hands, and officers and men looked with anxiety for the promised supports. Their situation was a precarious one. The enemy was visibly rallying, and with no lack of troops. His first counter-attack was made by the Fifteenth North Carolina, which came down on the double quick from its camp over the crest, and charged the rifle pits. It was met by the men of the Third with a fire by which its commander, Colonel McKinney, was killed, and some forty of his men killed and wounded, and retired in extreme disorder. General Cobb states that this "confusion" extended down the line of two Georgia regiments which had advanced on the right of the Fifteenth North Carolina; and had the rest of the Vermont brigade now been promptly thrown across the river a permanent occupation of the enemy's works would probably have been effected. The rest of Smith's division could then have crossed without opposition, and the line of Warwick River would have been pierced. But no supports followed the detachment of the Third Virginia. It held its position along the breastwork for about half an hour, keeping down by a well directed fire from the works on the right and front, and at one time, by a gallant dash from the left of the line, made by a few men under Lieutenant Buck of Company D., once more scattering their assailants.¹⁶

Meanwhile the enemy, whose troops had been under arms all day for miles along the western side of the river, gathered in heavy forces. By the exertions of General Howell Cobb and Colonel Anderson,¹⁷

¹⁶ In a letter written at the time, describing this action, Lieutenant Buck said: "We were bound to die rather than retreat without orders. Something desperate had got to be done. A charge was our only show, and charge we did. We jumped the works and gave a loud yell. The rebels supposed a brigade was charging them and ran like sheep. But when they saw it was only a ruse, they rallied. I saw whole regiments marching against us, and we retreated, never expecting to recross the fatal stream."

¹⁷ Colonel G. T. Anderson of Georgia, whose brigade subsequently, to its sorrow, met the Vermont brigade at Funkstown, Md.

the demoralized regiments of their commands were rallied and others brought up, till no less than seven regiments¹⁸ hemmed in the little band of Vermonters. Musketry and artillery now re-opened heavily on Pingree at short range from the works on his right and front, and two Confederate regiments came down on his left and opened a far more fatal fire, from which the scarp of the rifle pits afforded no protection. Captain Pingree sent back two successive messengers to Colonel Hyde, asking either for reinforcements or for permission to retire; but neither came. Later in the service, under similar circumstances, he would have exercised the discretion which such a desperate strait confers on a commander, and have withdrawn his detachment; but now he and his men only knew that their orders were to occupy the works and wait for reinforcements; and they waited, though officers and men were dropping by scores. Captain Pingree was wounded in the haunch by a musket ball early in the fight; but, though bleeding freely, he remained at his post. Soon after Lieutenant Chandler of Company F. was struck by a ball which cut off three of the bones of his hand, and then passed through his thigh. Fifteen minutes later, Captain Pingree received a second wound from a ball which took off the entire thumb, with the metacarpal bone, of his right hand. He was urged by officers and men to retire while retreat was possible; but he refused to go till at last a messenger returned with the welcome direction from Colonel Hyde to withdraw — when he gave the order to fall back, and, himself too faint to walk alone, allowed his men to help him back across the

¹⁸ These were the Fifteenth North Carolina, Seventh Georgia, Eighth Georgia, Eleventh Georgia, Cobb's (Georgia) Legion, Sixteenth Georgia, and Second Louisiana — Confederate Reports.

stream.¹⁹ The rattle of musketry and roar of artillery was too continuous at this time to permit orders to be heard for any distance; but those who did not hear saw that a retreat was ordered, and in five minutes the line had scattered back across the creek, through a shower of musket balls which made the water boil as in a hailstorm. Of the 192 brave men who crossed the stream, about 100 came back unharmed, bearing with them as many as they could of their wounded comrades.²⁰ General Magruder states that the four companies of Vermonters were driven out of the rifle pits at the point of the bayonet by four Confederate regiments;²¹ but the men of the Third saw no hostile bayonets, nor were the rifle pits reoccupied for some little time after they left them. They were driven out by musketry fire from the front and flank. They had made as gallant a dash as was ever attempted; had fairly carried a line of rifle pits; had dispersed with serious loss a Confederate regiment, 500 strong;²² and had held their position in front of two Confederate brigades for forty minutes, and till they were ordered back. More could not have been asked of or done by mortal men.

¹⁹ The remarkable fact that Pingree received no mention in the official reports, and the almost fatal result of his injuries, have been heretofore mentioned, in the regimental history of the Third regiment.

²⁰ Surgeon E. E. Phelps, in his report to Governor Holbrook, said: "The usual percentage of loss in battle is one in every 40; but in this action, out of 198 men engaged three in every four were killed or wounded." This was putting it rather strong. Co. F., which suffered worst, had 27 killed and wounded, out of 52 engaged; and the loss of the detachment was 45 per cent — a sufficiently sad proportion.

²¹ "At this moment the Seventh and Eighth Georgia, under Colonels Wilson and Lamar; the left wing of the Sixteenth Georgia under Colonel Goode Bryan, and two companies of the Second Louisiana under Colonel J. T. Norwood, accompanied by the Fifteenth North Carolina, with fixed bayonets charged the rifle pits and drove the enemy from them with great slaughter." — Report of General J. B. Magruder.

²² "The regiment [Fifteenth North Carolina] had about 500 men engaged." — Report of Lieutenant Colonel Ihrie, North Carolina.

The affair again might well have ended here. The reconnoissance had been made and had shown that the enemy had two or three lines of works and plenty of men to defend them. The river was now a greater obstacle than before; for by the closing of dams below or opening sluices above, the depth of water had been increased so that the men who returned found the water considerably deeper than when they went over. The firing, which had now been going on, at times with great severity, for about nine hours, had of course fully aroused the enemy, and there was every reason to suppose that he would be massing troops to oppose any further demonstration. Such was the fact. Within half an hour after the repulse of Pingree's battalion, the three Confederate brigades of Cobb, Anderson and Toombs were in position behind the screen of woods beyond the river, and General McLaws had his entire division under arms within supporting distance. Yet at five o'clock the attack was renewed. General Smith speaks of it as another "reconnoissance;" but it was really a fresh attempt to effect a lodgment on the right bank of the Warwick. That the Union generals should have been unwilling to give the matter up so, is not surprising; but that they should have still sent companies against regiments, and battalions against brigades, is astonishing. In the new dispositions, a section of a battery was placed in the right of the open field, where it could enfilade the rifle pits on the other bank, which ran at an angle with the shore, and a general cannonade was opened by General McClellan's orders all along the front from Lee's Mill to Yorktown, to distract the attention of the enemy. Colonel Stoughton of the Fourth was then ordered to send four companies across the dam to storm the one-gun battery, and Colonel Lord to throw four companies of the Sixth across below the dam, where the Third had crossed, and again assault the rifle pits.

Colonel Stoughton selected Companies A., Captain Pratt; F., Captain Brown; L., Lieutenant Lillie; and C., Captain

Atherton, for his storming party and formed them in the edge of the woods. He also strengthened his skirmish line along the edge of the swamp by two companies, and ordered the skirmishers to keep up an incessant fire on the works opposite; and when the seventeen guns of Mott's, Wheeler's and Kennedy's batteries again opened from the crest, the detachment fixed bayonets and started for the dam, led by Colonel Stoughton. But a tremendous outburst of artillery and musketry from the earthworks opposite, which met them as soon as they came out into the open ground and under which men began to fall rapidly, warned General Smith that the effort was madness. He despatched Lieutenant Bowen of his staff to order Stoughton to withdraw the battalion, and it retired, left in front, in good order, with a loss of two men killed and twelve wounded, among the latter being Captain Atherton, who received a ball in the groin which occasioned his retirement from the service. Colonel Stoughton and Lieutenant Bowen brought up the rear, carrying between them a wounded man, and all the wounded were brought back to the woods.

The movement of the Sixth was more persistent and involved more serious loss. The regiment moved at double quick down through the open field into the timber on the left, at the head of the slope to the river. Here the duty of charging the rifle pits was committed by Colonel Lord to the right wing of his regiment, and he accompanied it to the river bank. The battalion, led by Company A., Captain George Parker, marched down by the flank through the swampy borders of the stream, coming under a sharp fire of musketry as soon as it appeared in the open; and pushed across the overflowed bottom land, and through the channel of the river, the men holding their cartridge boxes and rifles above their heads. As they reached the opposite shore the leading companies fronted into line, within twenty yards of the rifle pits. The fire from them was incessant; but the Confederates

kept themselves so well covered and held their guns at so high an angle, that their shots for the most part passed over the heads of the men of the Sixth, or few would have returned to tell the tale of their charge. As it was, officers and men were dropping fast, Captain Reynolds of Company F. fell, shot through the body, as he was bringing his company into line in the shallow water in front of the breastwork. Captain Davenport of Company H. was disabled by a ball through the thigh. Lieutenant Bailey of Company D., received a fatal wound. Lieutenant Kinney, commanding Company I., was seriously wounded. Three of the five company commanders and some 40 men had fallen; but the rest pressed on. A few had reached the opposing breastwork, when the order to fall back came. Colonel Lord, perceiving that the advance of the Fourth had failed and that it was annihilation for his men to advance or remain under the tremendous cross-fire now concentrated on them, gave the order to retreat. It was obeyed with a deliberation which enabled the survivors to bring off their wounded comrades, and rescue the colors of the regiment, which had fallen from the hand of the fainting color-bearer. The return was as dangerous as the advance; and before the battalion reached cover on the left bank, it had suffered a loss of 23 men killed or mortally wounded and 57 others more or less severely wounded. It was now near nightfall. The enemy, content with the repulse of the troops which had been dashed by handful against his works, and deterred by the fire of the batteries which were still booming from the Garrow clearing, made no counter demonstration, and the affair of Lee's Mill was over.

General Smith says in his report: "Among the four companies of skirmishers of the Third Vermont who crossed the creek, there were more individual acts of heroism performed than I ever read of in a great battle." Such acts were not confined to any one regiment. A few of them may be re-

counted here. Among the men of the Third who charged the rifle pits was William Scott, the young man who was sentenced to death for sleeping on his post soon after the regiment went out, and was pardoned by the President. Scott pressed forward where the balls were flying thickest and fell with several mortal wounds. His comrades raised him up, and heard him with his dying breath amid the shouting and din of the fight, lift a prayer for God's blessing on President Lincoln, who had given him a chance to show that he was no coward or sneak, and not afraid to die.²³ There were not many more touching incidents than this, in the war.

Corporal Hutchinson, to whom Colonel Hyde had handed his handkerchief to be waved as a signal when the rifle pits were gained, fell mortally wounded half way across the river, the ball that killed him passing through the handkerchief. His thoughts were solely on his duty, and exclaiming sadly: "I cannot wave the flag after all," he handed the bloody handkerchief to a comrade, to do it for him.

A man of the Third stood in the farther edge of the water with a broken thigh, leaning on his gun, and distributing his ammunition, which he had kept dry, to those whose cartridges had got wet in crossing. The wounded men who were able to help themselves, almost invariably declined help in retiring, and brought back their rifles with them.

Corporal James Fletcher of Company E., of the Third, was on the sick list with a fever, but insisted on going out

²³ Scott was buried in a little grove of holly and wild cherry trees on the Garrow Farm, in a spot where some Revolutionary War soldier, who fell in the siege of Yorktown nearly 80 years before, had found burial, as shown by buttons and a belt clasp thrown up in digging Scott's grave. The chaplain prayed earnestly for the President, and on the calm face of the dead his comrades thought they saw a look of satisfaction and peace, which would have richly rewarded the kind heart of Abraham Lincoln if he could have seen it, for his act of mercy. The incident was made known to Mr. Lincoln, and in an interview with Adjutant General P. T. Washburn subsequently, Mr. Lincoln alluded to it with emotion, speaking also in terms of high praise of the bravery shown by the Vermonters at Lee's Mill.

with his company, went through the fight, went back into the creek, after recrossing it, to rescue some of the wounded men, and then went into the hospital “to resume his fever with aggravation,” in the words of an army letter.

Julian A. Scott, the drummer boy of the same company,²⁴ a lad of 16, went twice across the creek to rescue wounded men. Aided by Ephraim Brown he was carrying Private John Backum, who was shot through the lungs, away from the scarp of the rifle pits when Brown was disabled by a shot through the thigh. Young Scott carried Backum across the river on his back, and returning helped Brown over, each of them being men larger than himself. Eight bullets passed through the clothing of Captain Bennett of Company K., of the Third, without making a scratch on his skin. Lieutenant Whittemore of Company E., took a gun from a disabled soldier and did some effective shooting in the rifle pits. Captain D. B. Davenport of Company H., of the Sixth, was wounded. His son Henry, drummer boy, a youngster of but 11 years, helped his father out of the water and to a place of safety, and returning to the stream to get some water for him, had the filled cup knocked out of his hand by a bullet. Sergeant R. G. Bellows bore the colors of the Sixth regiment nearly to the rifle pits. The order to fall back had come and had been obeyed by the rest of the color guard, when he received a fatal wound.²⁵ As the colors fell from his fainting grasp into the water, they caught the eye of Sergeant Edward A. Holton. Shouting to some men of his company who were near him to rally on the

²⁴ Subsequently an artist of some name, and the painter of the large picture of the battle of Cedar Creek in the Vermont State House.

²⁵ The case of Sergeant Bellows was one of those not uncommon ones, in which almost bloodless injuries proved fatal. The ball struck him in the knee, carrying into the joint the cloth of his pantaloons without passing through the fabric. He died of this wound in hospital at Burlington, a month after. He was one of the finest-looking men in the regiment, and as brave as he was handsome.

colors, Holton ran back, rescued the flag, and carried it safely back across the stream, while others of the men bore the color-bearer to the southern bank.. Holton's act was noticed in a general order, and won him a commission.

The loss of the brigade at Lee's Mill was as follows:

	KILLED.	WOUNDED.	DIED OF WOUNDS.
Second Regiment,	1	1	1
Third	26	63	9
Fourth	2	10	1
Fifth	2	7	0
Sixth	<u>13</u>	<u>67</u>	<u>10</u>
Total,	44	148	21

Of the wounded seven fell into the hands of the enemy. General Magruder, in his report, states that his loss “did not exceed 75 killed and wounded.” His troops fought almost entirely under cover, and their loss may not have largely exceeded that figure.²⁶

The conduct of this engagement on the Union side was a mystery to the troops engaged in it, at the time, as it has been to many students of the war. The Comte de Paris says that the generals who organized the demonstration, failed to agree beforehand on the importance it was to assume. But as regards the course of the general of the army there is no mystery. General McClellan had selected Yorktown (where the Confederate works were strongest) as the point of main attack. He had in his mind a grand scientific siege operation, which should rival some of the scenes in the Crimean war, to observe which he was sent abroad by Jefferson Davis when the latter was secretary of war. He was digging parallels and building earthworks, and intended, when he got ready, to overwhelm the Confederate forts by a grand *feu d'enfer, a la Sebastopol*, from his 100 and 200 pounders,

²⁶ A nominal list attached to the report of Lieut. Colonel Ithie, Fifteenth North Carolina, shows 12 killed and 31 wounded of that regiment.

which had been dragged with infinite labor from City Point. It was not his plan to pierce the Warwick line and turn Yorktown, and he did not wish or expect to do more at Lee's Mill than to occupy some works from which was supposed the enemy had been driven. "The moment," says General Smith, "I found resistance serious and the numbers opposed great, I acted in obedience to the warning instructions of the general-in-chief, and withdrew the small numbers of troops exposed from under fire."

General McClellan, after it was over, affected to consider the information gained worth more than it cost. That it was so may well be doubted; yet it is certain that the daring shown by the Vermonters was not without value to the army²⁷ or with effect on the enemy. Colonel Levy, of the Second Louisiana, who came to the Union lines with a flag of truce on an errand relating to the burial of the Union dead, two days after, asked what regiment it was that first assaulted the rifle pits. He was told that it was a detachment of the Third Vermont. "It was lucky for us," he replied, "that you did not send over many such detachments."

Among the various explanations imagined and suggested at the time, for the failure to push over supports to the Vermont troops after they had effected a lodgment across the river, was one, which gained wide currency, to the effect that General Smith was drunk. A report that he was too much intoxicated to ride his horse during the engagement was made the subject of a resolution offered in Congress, and of a court of inquiry thereupon called for by General Smith. It was contradicted by a statement, addressed to the Vermont delegation in Congress and signed by most of the field officers of the Vermont brigade, including all the colonels, in which they pronounced the report "unequivocally false." The

²⁷ The army correspondents generally agreed with the correspondent of the *New York World* that "the fighting and the bravery of the Vermont boys covered the arms of their State with glory."

court of inquiry was dismissed by General McClellan after the first day, on the ground that the evidence offered was sufficient to exonerate General Smith without further proceedings. The military committee of the U. S. Senate visited the camps near Lee's Mill, to investigate the matter, and reported the charge against General Smith to be without foundation; and the matter passed from the public mind.

During the night of the 16th of April and nights following, strong earthworks to shelter the Union batteries were thrown up on the Garrow farm, in part by the work of the Vermont troops; but beyond occasional artillery firing by night and day, and frequent exchange of shots across the creek by the skirmishers and sharp shooters on the two sides, no further hostilities followed at that point. Had Magruder had more men there would probably have been some fighting on the south side of Warwick River.²⁸

On Saturday, the 19th, a flag of truce was hoisted by the Confederates, and Colonel Levy of the Second Louisiana, met Colonel Currie of General Smith's staff on the dam, with a proposal to arrange for the removal of the Union dead, which was gladly accepted, and the Confederates soon brought over 29 dead bodies, blackened by decay and despoiled of shoes, buttons and valuables.²⁹ The remainder of the dead Vermonters they said, had been buried with their own, by mistake, in the night. The bodies received were buried among the pines on the Garrow farm

During the four days after the 16th, the seriously wounded

²⁸ "All the reinforcements which were on the way to me had not yet joined me, so that I was unable to follow up the action of April 16th by any decisive step." —General Magruder's report.

²⁹ "I recovered to-day the bodies of our men killed on the 16th — 29 in number. The enemy have four wounded in their hands, whom I will endeavor to recover to-morrow by offering four well men in exchange. The officer bearing the flag acknowledged a severe loss on their part, and spoke in high terms of the conduct of our men." — McClellan to Secretary Stanton, April 19, 1862.

Vermonters were taken in ambulances to Cheeseman's Landing and Ship Point on the York River, and thence by boats to Fortress Monroe. Their condition aroused remarkable concern on the part of both the National and State authorities. Secretary Stanton telegraphed Governor Holbrook that they would be sent home if suitable hospital accommodations could be provided for them in Vermont. The only hospital building in the State at that time, was the U. S. Marine hospital in Burlington, built by the Government in President Pierce's administration, which had stood empty since it was erected. Adj't General Washburn went to Washington and arranged to have this building turned over to the State for an army hospital, and to have the wounded Vermonters sent thither. General Washburn and Quartermaster General Davis thereupon went to Fortress Monroe, and brought thence 115 wounded men to New York. They were met there by ex-Adj't General Baxter and Colonels S. M. Waite and B. B. Smalley of the governor's staff, and a corps of five surgeons, and, with the exception of twelve who were left in hospital at New York too dangerously hurt to bear further transportation, were brought with the tenderest care to Vermont. Twenty-four were taken to Brattleboro and the rest to Burlington, where under the skillful care of Dr. S. W. Thayer, who had been appointed hospital surgeon, most of them rapidly gained strength and health. This arrangement was expanded into a general one, under which many wounded and sick Vermonters were taken to Vermont; and, under the superior professional treatment they received, and in the good air of their native State, a remarkably high ratio of recoveries was established; but though this arrangement worked well in Vermont, it was found to occasion some friction when adopted, as it was subsequently, by some other States, and it was rescinded by the government.

Frequent night alarms which called the regiments into line; constant sharp shooting on the picket line; plenty of

fatigue duty on the breastworks; and two reconnoissances, in one of which the Second lost three men killed, and in the other Lieutenant Nevins of the Sixth received a wound from which he died, were the chief events and occupations of the last two weeks of April.

A general cannonade from the enemy's works on the night of the 3d of May, called the brigade and the army to arms, in anticipation of an attack. The shells flew thickly over and into the camps; but no serious damage was done and no attack was received. The morning disclosed the meaning of the proceeding. General McClellan having almost made ready to open his siege batteries, the enemy was quite ready to leave the line of the Warwick. Having secured a month of most valuable time, during which the defences of Richmond were vastly strengthened and the first conscription act, which heavily increased the military strength of the Confederacy, was passed, General Johnston once more surprised the Union generals by a sudden and successful retreat. Two contrabands brought the first word of it, at daylight on the 4th, into the Union lines. The Fifth Vermont was at once sent across the dam, to occupy the abandoned works; and at eight o'clock the brigade, in place of the usual Sunday morning inspections, was in motion to the front, with two day's rations in the haversacks. Smith's division crossed on the dam and pushed forward by the road from Lee's Mill to Williamsburg, while Hooker's division marched on the right by the nearly parallel road from Yorktown to the same point. Hancock led the column of Smith's division and Brooks's Vermont brigade marched next. The two columns rather curiously changed roads during the day. Though Hooker had the shorter road, Smith move fastest. About noon Hancock's advance was stopped by the burning of a bridge over a branch of Skiff Creek, across which his road lay. Having halted, General Hancock sent forward four companies of the Second Vermont, under Lieut. Colonel Stannard, which

extinguished the fire.³⁰ But the bridge was not possible for artillery, and the division, by order of General Sumner, commanding both columns, crossed through the intervening fields to the road on the right. Smith reached this road before Hooker had come up, and, keeping on, obliged the latter to halt, while he (Smith) filed into the road in advance of him. The Vermonters were now leading, and gave a specimen of the marching quality by which they came to be distinguished in after days. The column was to halt near the Halfway House, but the head of it had passed that point some three miles, when General Keyes, who was following Smith, with his two other divisions, learned the fact. Calling an orderly he said: "If your horse has bottom enough to catch up with that Vermont brigade, I want you to overtake them and order a halt. Tell them we are not going to Richmond today."

Hooker followed Smith for two or three miles and then, impatient at having to follow where he expected to lead, he obtained permission to cross to the left road and went forward by that. Smith's advance overtook the cavalry who were pressing the enemy's rear, and sunset found his division halted in front of the line of redoubts³¹ southeast of Williamsburg, which had been built for a defensive line by Magruder some months before. The rear guard of Johnston's

³⁰ "Finding the enemy had fired a bridge on Skiff Creek, on the direct road to Williamsburg, I sent first a party of cavalry to extinguish the fire if possible. They were fired upon by the enemy and retired after exchanging shots. I then ordered four companies of the Second Vermont, under Lieut. Colonel Stannard, to the burning bridge, and to extinguish the flames, which duty they performed, first driving the enemy away, and saving the sleepers of the bridge."— Report of General Hancock.

³¹ There were ten of these, with four epaulements and other minor works, extending across the Peninsula, here contracted to a width of about five miles.

army occupied some of these, while the main body kept on to Richmond. In front of two of these redoubts, commanding the approach to Williamsburg by the Yorktown road, General Smith, under the orders of General Sumner, formed his command for an assault, with Hancock's brigade deployed in front and the Vermont brigade in double column for support. But the lateness of the hour and the character of the ground, which was covered with a tangled undergrowth between the trees, made an advance well nigh impossible, and the troops bivouacked where they stood. Hooker marched till eleven o'clock, and then halted for the night, half a mile from the enemy's line. The night was rainy, and sleep contended with serious discomforts and anxieties for possession of the weary soldiers.

WILLIAMSBURG.

Next day, May 5th, the planless and unsatisfactory battle of Williamsburg was fought. It opened in front of Fort Magruder — the strongest of the Confederate works — on the left, where General Hooker, without specific orders and without concert with the other generals, attacked at seven in the morning. He silenced Fort Magruder, but soon found himself on the defensive. Johnston, fairly overhauled and in danger of losing his trains, had turned to fight. He sent back Longstreet to help his rear guard, and by nine o'clock Longstreet's division was pressing in masses on Hooker's line. It became very warm for Hooker; but he fought till noon without the reinforcements which he had called for, and without any effective diversion in any other part of the field.³²

General Smith had expected to attack the works before

³² "The fact is that when Hooker began his attack, Sumner, Heintzelman and Keyes had adopted another plan of action, irrespective of Hooker. There was no concerted movement." —General A. S. Webb.

him at daylight and had his division in line as soon as it was light enough to move; but he was held back by General Sumner, and the occupation of the division during the forenoon, was to stand in the rain, which poured heavily, and listen to the battle which Hooker was fighting hardly half a mile away. Yet all of the Vermonters were not idle; and an important bit of service performed by some of them led to Hancock's movement on the right, which proved the decisive movement of the battle. General Smith in the morning had sent Captain Steward of the U. S. Engineers, to reconnoiter the works in front of his position. Stewart found them protected by a ravine and offering no practicable point of attack; but he learned from a colored man that two miles to the right there was a road, crossing by a dam³³ the stream which flowed through the ravine, and leading to the rear of the redoubts. He reported this to General Smith, who sent Captain Currie of his staff with four companies of the Fourth Vermont to verify the information. At half past ten o'clock Captain Currie returned and reported that they had not only found a practicable crossing for artillery; but that a redoubt on the other side, built to command the crossing, was to all appearance unoccupied. Smith send Currie to report these facts to General Sumner, who could hardly believe the latter circumstances; but decided to take advantage of it. By his order General Smith sent Hancock, who held the right of his division, to occupy the undefended works and advance from them if he thought prudent. Hancock started at once with three regiments of his own brigade and two of Davidson's , Wheeler's battery and a company of cavalry; crossed the dam; and at noon had reached and occupied, unmolested, not only the work nearest the dam but a stronger redoubt half a mile in advance of it,³⁴ from which open ground

³³ Known as "Cub Dam."

³⁴ Mr. Swinton, the historian, says that General Johnston informed him after the close of the war, that neither he or any of the generals with him were aware of the existence of these redoubts on his extreme left, till after Hancock had occupied them. Replying in 1885 to a similar statement made by Jefferson Davis in his "Rise and Fall of the Confederacy," General Johnston says that "the positions of the redoubts were all known;" but that "a rear guard distributed in all of them, could have held none of them."

extended to the redoubts in front of Smith's position. Hancock had in fact turned the flank of the enemy's line, and had a fine position from which to attack the two redoubts between him and Fort Magruder. Sending to General Smith for a brigade to protect his rear, he prepared to assault these redoubts, which were occupied in force by the enemy.

In the meantime, General Smith had been directed by General Sumner to send one of his brigades to the assistance of General Hooker on the left, and had ordered the Vermont brigade forward for the purpose; but receiving Hancock's report of the state of things on the right, and deeming that an attack on the enemy's left would be the most effectual means of helping Hooker, General Smith procured a change of the order and permission to take his two remaining brigades to reinforce Hancock. He had drawn them out into the road and was just starting with them, when General Sumner, becoming apprehensive for his centre, reversed the order, and called Smith back into line to resist and apprehended attack on the ground he then occupied. From their position in the edge of the woods, some of the Vermonters could see the operations to their right and front across the ravine. They saw Hancock's skirmishers, aided by a few shells from Wheeler's battery, drive the enemy from the redoubt nearest him, which, however, he hesitated to occupy till his supports should arrive. They saw, too, that Hancock was in some danger. General Johnston, alarmed at finding a formidable force on his flank, had sent thither Generals Early and D. H. Hill, with two brigades. These could be plainly seen reoccupying the works in front of Hancock, and then deploying for an assault on his position. Some of the enemy

were massed so near Smith that four guns of Mott's battery were ordered forward, and opened fire on them with obvious effect. Again and again General Smith asked permission to go to Hancock's aid. Twice General Brooks was directed to take his brigade to support Hancock, and once the brigade reached Cub Dam on the way thither, only to be ordered back. General Brooks swore vigorously at being sent back from the right where they were most wanted to the centre where they were not needed at all; but had no option but to obey. Sumner finally not only refused to permit Smith to send any more troops to the right, but ordered Hancock back to his "first position." The latter chose to understand this to mean the works he had first occupied across the dam. He took his time about retiring, and turned before he had gone far, to await Early's attack. This was made while the Vermont brigade was marching back from Cub Dam, and made unwelcome music in the ears of the Vermonters, who were burning for a chance to avenge Lee's Mill. Early threw forward four regiments, numbering about 2,000 men, against Hancock who had 1,500 in line on the crest. The latter waited till Early's lines were within short range, and then received them with a savage fire, under which they recoiled in confusion, leaving a row of dead and dying men which marked the limit of their advance. Early was wounded, and his repulse was completed by a charge in which a Confederate colonel and 150 of his men were taken prisoners. Hill endeavored to support Early; but his men would not face the fire from the crest, and the whole force fell back, having lost 500 men.

As Hill's regiments were forming for the second attack, General Hancock, not knowing how serious it might prove, despatched Captain Currie, who had remained with him, to hurry up the reinforcements he had been waiting for. Currie overtook the rear of Brooks's brigade, marching back instead of forward. The Third Vermont was at the rear of the column, and Colonel Hyde, at Currie's request, faced his

regiment about and took it back to help Hancock, while Currie dashed on to find General Smith and get more reinforcements. The cheering from the front told the men of the Third that something had happened there and they hurried up, at double quick, to find that Hancock had repulsed his assailants, and that the enemy in front of him had retired to the cover of the woods.

It was now six o'clock. Meantime Kearney's division of the Third corps had relieved Hooker on the left. General McClellan had arrived on the field, and General Smith by his order joined Hancock with most of his division. There was no more fighting, however. After nightfall Johnston withdrew and continued his retreat to Richmond.

In this battle of Williamsburg, Hooker and Kearney lost 2,200 men, killed, wounded and missing, and five guns, while Longstreet reported his loss at 1,560 killed, wounded and captured. Had Sumner permitted Smith to take his division, or even to send the Vermont brigade, to the support of Hancock, the latter would have moved up to the Confederate centre, taken Fort Magruder in the reverse, and changed the preponderance of loss heavily to the other side.

Though the shells from a Confederate battery, replying to Mott's guns, flew over and around the lines of the Vermont brigade in the afternoon, it sustained no loss. The Vermont troops, with the exception of the Third regiment, which was with Hancock, remained in their lines on the centre that night drenched with rain and without fires. Next morning the sun rose clear and bright; the rain and the rebels had gone; and the brigade, in pursuance of orders received the night before, marched round to the scene of Hancock's fight, passing on the way one of the forts he had taken, now filled with Confederate prisoners, many of them wounded. The Vermont surgeons busied themselves in the care of these, and performed most of the amputations required, as the Confederate surgeons sent back to care for their men were

comparatively inexperienced practitioners. The Vermont boys built fires for their foes, dried their clothes, covered them with U. S. Blankets, and would have shared rations with them if they had had any.

The battle of Williamsburg was fought on Monday. How tardily the pursuit of the enemy was conducted by McClellan, is matter of history. It was not till Friday that Smith's division started on up the Peninsula. The Vermont brigade marched 14 miles that day and 12 the next. On Sunday, the 11th, the brigade rested near New Kent Court House, the head of navigation on the river and base of supply for the army. Here the brigade remained four days, encamped on the ancient Custis Plantation, the property of General Fitzhugh Lee, near the mansion, from which the place takes its name, in which General Washington was married to Mrs. Custis. Moving thence on the 19th, it marched by way of Tunstall's Station to the left bank of the Chickahominy near New Bridge, ten miles from Richmond to the northeast. The march from Williamsburg was much of it through a fine country, now beautiful in the luxuriant growth of early summer. The weather was warm, though much of it was rainy. The march was made by easy stages of from five to eight miles a day. The long columns of infantry and artillery, the endless trains of army wagons, the camps covering all the country where the army halted, the waters of the Pamunkey packed with steamers and other vessels laden with army stores, offered an imposing spectacle. Strict orders to respect private property were given on the march; and they were obeyed to the extent of permitting a Virginia farmer to station his negro servant at a well and sell water to the thirsty soldiers at two cents a glass! Later in the war they did things somewhat differently.