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CHAPTER XII.
THE FIRST BRIGADE—CONTINUED.

Organization of the Sixth Corps—Movement to the Front of Richmond—Battle of Fair Oaks—Crossing the Chickahominy to Golding's Farm—Swamp fever and hard duty—Gaines's Mill and Golding's Farm—Retreat of the Army from Richmond—The stand of the rear guard at Savage's Station—Fighting of the Vermont brigade—The Fifth sustains the heaviest loss in killed and wounded ever suffered by a Vermont regiment—Casualties of the brigade—The retreat resumed—Affair at White Oak Swamp—Terrific Confederate cannonade—Firmness of the Vermont troops—The brigade at Malvern Hill—The terrible march to Harrison's Landing—The bivouac in the mud—Return to Fortress Monroe and to Alexandria.

At White House the Sixth Corps of the Army of the Potomac, with which the Vermont brigade was thenceforward connected, and to whose fame the Vermonters have been wont to flatter themselves that they contributed something, was organized. It was formed from Franklin's division of McDowell's corps, which joined the army at White House, having come up by water from Yorktown, and Smith's division of Keyes's (Fourth) corps.¹ General Franklin was placed in command of it, General Slocum succeeding Franklin in command of the First division. It was a notably good body of troops, from the first. Its first division consisted of General Phil Kearney's old brigade of New Jersey troops, now commanded

¹ The Fifth corps was organized at the same time, and Fitz John Porter assigned to its command. These were at first styled "Provisional" corps.

by Colonel George W. Taylor; Slocum's brigade, now commanded by Colonel J. J. Bartlett; and Newton's brigade.² The Second division consisted of Hancock's brigade, Brooks's Vermont brigade, and Davidson's brigade.³ The division and brigade commanders were almost all West Point graduates and accomplished soldiers, and no less than five of them rose to be corps commanders. It has been said of the Sixth Corps that "no other body of troops ever made for itself so proud a record. No corps, either in our own army or in any other, ever met the enemy so frequently in general battle. Never were either of its two divisions put to rout; and in almost all its encounters the corps held the field as victors."⁴

On the 22d of May the Sixth Corps was holding the right of the army, and the Vermont brigade was encamped on a low pine ridge near Gaines's Mill,⁵ about eight miles in a straight line from Richmond. The country about them was diversified with woodland and open fields around the houses of Virginia farmers and the mansions of planters, who were still holding their slaves in considerable numbers, and were enjoying the protection of Union guards stationed around their houses while they were asserting the right of secession and predicting the success of the Confederate arms. Many of these houses, however, were soon taken

² Kearney's brigade consisted of the First, Second, Third and Fourth New Jersey; Slocum's of the Sixteenth and Twenty-seventh New York, Fifth Maine and Ninety-sixth Pennsylvania; Newton's of the Eighteenth, Thirty-first and Thirty-second New York and Ninety-fifth Pennsylvania

³ Hancock's brigade consisted of the Fifth Wisconsin, Ninety-ninth Pennsylvania, Forty-third New York and Sixth Maine; Davidson's, of the Thirty-third, Seventy-seventh and Forty-ninth New York and Seventh Maine.

⁴ Surgeon Stevens's "Three Years in the Sixth Corps."

⁵ A Vermont soldier was running the mill, and grinding wheat brought in by the foragers, for the troops.

for hospitals, and filled with sick and wounded soldiers of both armies. Among those so used was "Liberty Hall," the birthplace of Patrick Henry, which stood in the rear of the position of Franklin's corps. The health of the command was better than it had been in the swampy camps on Warwick River, and the spirits of the men were high. Things generally seemed to be looking well for the cause of the government. Since the first of the year Burnside had occupied Roanoke Island and Newbern, N.C., on the coast. The battle of Shiloh had been fought and was claimed as a Union victory. New Orleans and Island No. 10 had been taken, and the control of the Mississippi was lost to the Confederacy. Norfolk—the original evacuation of which remains the most astonishing and unnecessary event of the war, in the view of both North and South—had been reoccupied by the forces of the Union. In various minor encounters the advantage was claimed for the Federals. General Banks's troubles in the Shenandoah Valley, which afforded such solemn experience for our Vermont cavalry, were impending, but had not yet begun. The confidence of the troops in McClellan and in themselves was unbounded. They were before Richmond with an army which seemed to them irresistible; and for them it was a mere question of time whether they should march into the rebel capital and end the war now, or a few days later. For the Vermont troops, moreover, the paymaster, Major Freeman, was on hand, and money plenty. Altogether it was a cheerful time.

On the 24th the brigade was moved forward a mile or more, and encamped on the farm of Dr. Gaines, about three quarters of a mile from the Chickahominy, on the opposite shore of which the videttes of the enemy were visible with a glass. The river and the streams running into it were rising with recent heavy thunder showers, and the fatigue duty, in making roads, at which many of the troops were set, was

pretty arduous.⁶ The booming of artillery, used in the skirmishes at the front as McClellan was advancing his lines toward Richmond, was a frequent sound, and on the 31st it deepened into a steady roar, heard from ten o'clock till dark, from the field, four to five miles away across the Chickahominy, where the first general engagement of the Peninsular campaign, called by northern historians the battle of Fair Oaks, and by the southerners Seven Pines, was fought.

In this battle the Third and Fourth corps of the Army of the Potomac, which had crossed the Chickahominy several days before and advanced within six miles of Richmond, were attacked by General Joe Johnston, with the larger part of his army, in a sturdy effort to cut them to pieces while separated by the river from the rest of the army. But Keyes and Heintzelman, whose men “rose from beds of mud to fight amid the pelting of the storm,”⁷ reinforced by Sumner, made a good fight against superior numbers, and at nightfall still held their ground on the right bank of the Chickahominy. The battle was renewed the next morning, and after two or three hours ended in the withdrawal of the Confederates into their lines around Richmond, while the Union commanders re-established the portions of their lines that had been lost the previous day. The attempt to drive the left wing of the army into the river had failed, and had cost the Confederates over 5,000 men killed and wounded, among the latter being General J. E. Johnston, who was wounded in the shoulder

⁶ “A marked evidence of the spirit of our volunteer free soldiery was offered yesterday. Part of our regiment was sent out to bridge over water courses and corduroy the road to prepare it for the passage of artillery. Long pine sticks had to be carried by hand many of them over half a mile, and then floated to where needed. Many stripped off their clothes; others plunged in with them on; all working nobly, till three deep and swift channels were spanned and the low places corduroyed. Others labored still more severely and did not come in till midnight. Things now seem nearly ready for our passage over the river, so that we may move “on to Richmond.” –Letter from the camp of the Second Vermont.

⁷ General Keyes's report.

by a Union bullet and struck from his horse by a shell. The Union loss was nearly as great.

While this struggle of the 31st was in progress, the Vermonters, with the rest of General Smith's division, were under orders to be ready to take arms at a moment's notice. With intensest interest they watched the signs of the conflict. The roar of artillery drew nearer till during the afternoon the added roll of musketry could be distinguished and for a while after dark the flashes of cannon and exploding shells were visible. There was little sleep for any of the troops that night. The men of the Vermont brigade were under arms most of the night, and before light next morning they started with three days' rations and sixty rounds of ammunition, to cross the river at New Bridge, and take part in that day's fight. But the high water in the river interfered with the construction of the pontoon bridge which was to replace one burned by the enemy, and the brigade waited on the bank till ten o'clock A. M., when word came that its help was not needed, and it marched back to camp, leaving the Sixth regiment to guard the bridge. An hour later the regiments were called into line without arms, to hear the news of the repulse of the enemy, which was announced by the colonels and received by the men with rousing cheers. Accounts from the other side show that there was no cheering in Richmond that day; and that as the extent of the Confederate losses became known a feeling of apprehension deepened almost into panic that night in the Confederate capital.

The pause of fighting following the battle of Fair Oaks, was improved by McClellan to push his lines still nearer to Richmond. As part of this movement, Franklin's corps crossed the river and was posted on the right of the Union lines, leaving only Porter's corps on the left bank.

Moving with the Sixth corps, Smith's division packed knapsacks at three o'clock on the morning of June 5th, and

marching down the river four miles, crossed at Sumner's upper bridge, known as the "Grapevine Bridge," and moved up on the right bank to a hill near Golding's house, about a mile north of Fair Oaks, and half a mile south of the river. Here the Vermont brigade remained for nineteen days. It was its nearest approach to Richmond in a body, though a number of its members entered the city later, without arms, at various times during the war. The situation was an exciting one, and the duty severe. Stray shots and shells from the Confederate batteries on the hills in front often fell near the camps; and the opposing lines were so near that one day two men were wounded while buying things at a sutler's cart, in the camp of the Fifth Vermont, by a Confederate sharpshooter perched in a tree top.⁸ There was a good deal of digging going on, much of it at night, in the construction of breastworks and redoubts, of which the Vermonters had all they wanted. The picket duty was severe; and the apprehensions of attack such that the regiments stood to arms at three o'clock every morning, remaining in line till after sunrise. This continued till it became evident from the increasing sick list that want of sufficient rest was telling on the health of the men, when orders were so changed that but one regiment in each brigade took arms before daylight. Still the sickness increased, due to the drenching of clothing, blankets and provisions by the frequent rains, and the malaria from the swamps and overflowed bottom lands, which grew more deadly as the host season advanced. The camps and hospitals became filled with sick men, and the hospital steamers plied constantly from the White House to Washington and Philadelphia, bearing thousands of victims of "Chickahominy fever." This prevailed in both armies, though the Northerners naturally suffered most.

⁸ One of these, Sergeant Bartholomew, Co. E, Fourth Vermont, was dangerously wounded in the abdomen. The man who shot him was dropped later in the day by a marksman of the Fourth Vermont.

For three weeks the two armies now looked each other in the face. General R. E. Lee had succeeded to the command of the Confederate army, and it was reinforced till it numbered upwards of eighty thousand men. General McClellan was telegraphing daily to Washington that he was almost ready to take Richmond; but it was the confederate commander who forced the fighting, when it was renewed. General J.E.B. Stuart was first sent out with his troopers to operate on McClellan's communications, and by his famous raid around the Union army, contributed to delay action on the part of the latter, while Stonewall Jackson with his army of 20,000 men, was brought down from the Shenandoah Valley with the utmost secrecy and despatch.

On the 25th of June, McClellan advanced his left wing, which pressed back the Confederate lines from nearly a mile. This was McClellan's last offensive movement. On that day Jackson was but 12 miles from Richmond, and General Lee and he had met in person and arranged for a heavy blow for the relief of Richmond by a concerted attack on the Fifth corps, still on the north bank of the Chickahominy. Jackson expected to be within striking distance of Porter the next day. He did not get along as fast as he intended to, however, and did no fighting that day. But A. P. Hill, who was to co-operate with him, marching from Richmond with his division, crossed the Chickahominy that day, the 26th, at Meadow Bridge, above Mechanicsville, and attacked the portion of Porter's command (McCall's division) which was guarding the left bank and bridges below. Hill was driven back by McCall, with a loss, as stated by General Longstreet, of 3,000 or 4,000 men, while McCall's loss was but as many hundreds. A considerable part of this day's fighting was visible from the position of Smith's division, and the Vermonters, who had for a day or two worn their equipments constantly and kept their arms stacked in readiness for a sudden call, were put under arms with the rest of the division

in expectation of a movement. That night, in anticipation of the arrival of Lieut. Colonel Getty⁹ with some reserve batteries of 30-pound Parrotts and siege guns which had been attached to Smith's division, General Smith threw up a redoubt, known as "Fort Lincoln," on a crest in front of his position. The Second Vermont was on duty all night, as a guard to the working parties; and next day the heavy guns were mounted in the work, under the direction of Captain E. R. Platt, General Franklin's chief of artillery.

That night, the arrival of Jackson's army on his right and rear having been fully learned by General McClellan, he decided to retreat to the James River, leaving Porter one day more on the north bank to hold back Jackson and cover the start of the Union army.

Next day, Friday, June 27th, the bloody and memorable battle of Gaines's Mill was fought. The story of that day, on which, through six hours of desperate fighting and at fearful cost, the Fifth corps, of 17,000 men, reinforced late in the afternoon by Slocum's division of Franklin's corps, held the position on the north bank against the Confederate divisions of Jackson, Longstreet, the two Hills and Whiting,¹⁰ 55,000 strong, cannot be told here. In this battle General Smith took a direct part with his heavy artillery. From Fort Lincoln the Confederate columns advancing over Gaines's Hill across the river two miles away, to attack Porter's left, were distinctly visible, and Smith opened and maintained for several hours a fire on them, which though at long range, was a serious annoyance and damage to the enemy, General Pryor's brigade of Longstreet's division especially suffering

⁹ Afterwards the gallant division commander under whom the Vermont brigade won some of its brightest laurels.

¹⁰ This Whiting was a cousin of Colonel Whiting of the Second Vermont. He was a Northern man and a graduate of West Point, who, having married a Southern wife, took his word to the service of the Confederacy.

under it.¹¹ Of this first of the seven day's battles, the engagement inscribed on the Vermont standards under the title of "Golding's Farm,"¹² was an episode.

GOLDING'S FARM.

To understand this action, it is to be noted that while two thirds of the confederate army assaulted Porter on the north side of the river, it was the art of the other third, under Magruder, to distract the attention of the greater part of the Union army, on the south side, and thus to prevent the sending of help to Porter. To this end, Magruder made successive demonstrations against the Union lines in front of him, with ostentatious movements of troops and frequent furious cannonades. A considerable portion of these demonstrations were made against the position of Franklin's corps, whose lines were held throughout the day by Smith's division, the other division (Slocum's) having been sent across the river. Magruder's batteries opened from the crests in front of Smith about noon, and Smith's guns replied. The cannonading was kept up during the afternoon, and at times, the shells fell pretty thickly in the camps of the Vermont regiments, killing a man of the Fifth, and wounding three others. In the latter part of the afternoon, having discovered, probably, that half of Franklin's corps had been sent across the river, General Magruder ordered General Jones, commanding a division, to "feel of the enemy" in his front with strong pickets, and to "follow up any advantage that might offer." General Robert Toombs was directed by Jones to do the "feeling," with his brigade of Georgia troops. The

¹¹ General Pryor says in his Report that he deployed his brigade "under a galling fire from the enemy's battery over the river;" and that his troops "suffered severely from the battery across the Chickahominy."

¹² Erroneously dates in the lists of battles in Adj't General Washburn's Report for 1866, as occurring on the 26th.

pressure came on Hancock's brigade, which was manning the lines in front, supported by a portion of the Vermont brigade; and a sharp engagement, lasting two hours, followed. Toombs did not find his task a pleasant one, nor did he obtain any advantage to follow up, and with the repulse of his demonstration the operations of the day on the south side of the Chickahominy ended.

Taking up this affair in detail, with reference to the part taken in it by Vermont troops, it was about three o'clock in the afternoon when the enemy's movements in front of Smith became threatening. General Brooks, whose brigade was under arms near its camp, was there upon ordered to send a regiment to strengthen Hancock's line, in the skirts of the woods in front of Garnett's house. He sent the Fourth Vermont, and it was deployed between the Fifth Wisconsin and Forty-Third New York. Right opposite, a hundred yards away, across an open field, in the edge of some timber, was the skirmish line of the enemy supported by several Georgia regiments. The same troops had faced each other at that point for some days previous, and the men on the two sides had met in truces of their own arrangement, to exchange newspapers and trade coffee for tobacco, and a mutual understanding had been established that there should be no shooting on either side, without notice. This little arrangement came to an end that afternoon. Shortly after sundown the enemy advanced in line of battle, drove in the Union pickets—some of whom fell back while others took shelter in a hollow, over which the bullets soon flew thickly in both directions—and advancing half way across the field to the top of a low ridge, fired a volley. The Fourth Vermont, with the other regiments on its right and left, returned the fire so warmly that the enemy fell back to cover. They returned a while after, and partially sheltered by the ridge, kept up a sharp musketry fire, which

was returned by Hancock's men and the Vermonters, till some time after dark.

During this affair the Sixth Vermont was also brought up to support the right of Hancock's line; and the pickets, of the Forty-Third New York, having exhausted their ammunition, a portion of the Sixth Vermont took their places on the skirmish line, while two companies, under Major Tuttle, were sent some distance to the right, to take the enemy on the flank. Still later the Sixth relieved the Fifth Maine and Forty-Ninth Pennsylvania, and held the picket line on the centre through the night. Two companies of the Fifth Vermont¹³ were also on the picket line, in the low ground on the right. The rest of the brigade lay on their arms within supporting distance, through the night, the Fourth regiment having been withdrawn from the front before midnight.

The brigade commanders on each side considered this an affair of some consequence. General Toombs, in his report of it, says: "The action now raged with great violence for an hour and a half, the enemy exhibiting a determined purpose to drive us out of the ravine; but finding themselves incapable of wrenching it from the heroic grasp of the Second and Fifteenth Georgia volunteers, were driven back and repulsed after two hours of fierce and determined conflict." In fact, however, the repulse was wholly on the other side. General Hancock says: "The contest of musketry continued until long after dark, when the enemy was repulsed with serious loss. The cartridges of our troops were nearly exhausted at the close of the contest. The action of itself had its greatest importance from the fact that the enemy had just gained a success on the other bank of the Chickahominy, and from the fact that had he been able to force his way through our lines, at the point

¹³ Companies I and C.

held by me, he would have been able to separate the two portions of our army on either bank of the stream.” General Hancock further alludes to the “valuable assistance” rendered by General Brooks with the Fourth and Sixth Vermont.

The Fourth Vermont had eight men wounded in this action, and the Sixth lost one killed, six wounded and one missing. Hancock's commanding (including the Vermonters) had seven men killed and 111 wounded and missing. The regiments opposed to them were the Second, Fifteenth, Seventeenth, and Twentieth Georgia, of Toombs's brigade, and the Seventh Georgia of Anderson's brigade. General Toombs does not state his total loss; but he admits a loss of about 200 men killed and wounded in two of his regiments,¹⁴ and his aggregate loss was probably at least twice that of the Union troops opposed to him.

It has long been known that if General McClellan had that day resolutely thrown forward his left wing he could have marched into Richmond; for Magruder had but 25,000 men with which to oppose him, while McClellan had 60,000 men on the south side of the Chickahominy. “Had McClellan,” says General Magruder, in his report, “massed his force in column and advanced against any point in our line of battle, though the head of his column would have suffered severely, its momentum would have insured it success, and the occupation of our works about Richmond, and consequently of the city, might have been his reward.” But General McClellan was thinking this day not of advance but of retreat. During that night the unwelcome intelligence

¹⁴ General Toombs states that the Second Georgia “lost in killed and wounded about one-half of the men carried into action”—having previously stated that seven companies of the Second Georgia took about 250 muskets into action—and that the Fifteenth Georgia lost its commander, colonel McIntosh, mortally wounded, and 71 men killed and wounded. He adds that many other valuable officers and men were killed or wounded.

spread rapidly through the army that the siege of Richmond was to be abandoned, and that the retreat of the army had in fact begun. Long wagon trains and lines of artillery and troops were already moving toward White Oak Swamp; and bonfires of the net tents, supplied a few days before, and of commissary stores and clothing which could not be carried, began to light up the wide spread sites of the army camps. It was a time of general gloom, relieved in part by the universal conviction that immense superiority in numbers on the part of the enemy alone had compelled the retreat; and the equally universal confidence, among the troops, that the genius and ability of their general-in-chief would bring them out all right in the not distant end.¹⁵

Next day Franklin's corps was withdrawn a short distance toward Fair Oaks; the movement of the Vermont brigade being accelerated by a furious shelling opened on its camps in the forenoon by rebel batteries posted on Gaines's Hill across the river, and on Garnett's Hill in front. The shells flew thick and fast, crossing each other at right angles over and around the tents, killing two men and wounding six before the column started. But the men had their knapsacks already packed, and the brigade moved off to the left for half a mile through the woods between the river and Fair Oaks, with the rest of the division followed. On the way the rear guard, of Davidson's brigade, turned to meet Anderson's Georgia brigade, which crowded on its rear, and gave the latter a rebuff in which the Seventh and Eighth Georgia lost by their own account 150 men, including Colonel Lamar of the Eighth Georgia, who was severely wounded

¹⁵ "That we are any of us saved, is the result only of McClellan's genius."—Army letter.

It was this night that McClellan sent his famous letter to Secretary Stanton, in which he said: "The government has not sustained the army. If you do not do so now the game is lost. * * * You have done your best to sacrifice this army." When he was writing this McClellan had 20,000 more men than were opposed to him.

and taken prisoner; Lieut. Colonel White, commanding the Third Georgia, also captured; and Lieut. Colonel Tower, Eighth Georgia, Major Magruder, and a dozen commissioned officers wounded.

Starting before daylight next morning, Sunday, June 29th, while a thin picket line (withdrawn at sunrise) kept up a show of strength in front of Magruder's lines, General Smith's division moved to the east, along the highlands skirting the Chickahominy, halting and forming line near Dr. Trent's house, to cover the rear of the wagon trains. Then turning to the southwest it marched to Savage's Station. The scene of destruction and apparent confusion prevailing there was one not soon to be forgotten by any eye witness. To this point a large share of the immense stores gathered at the White House had been brought by railroad, and that could not now be loaded into the wagons was destroyed. Piles of hard bread as large as houses, and immense quantities of flour, sugar, coffee and pork, in barrels, were consigned to the flames, and were made unfit for use by the smoke when not utterly consumed. Boxes of clothing and shoes were knocked open and every man helped himself to what he wanted, while enough was left to clothe and shoe the inhabitants of the region for two years after. A long train of cars was loaded with powder and shells, the cars set on fire, and the train started down grade to the river, filling the air with exploding shells and fragments of shattered cars as it held its fiery way, till it crashed through the blazing railroad bridge, when, with a grand explosion, train and bridge disappeared together. Here too were the large army hospitals, in which over 2,500 sick and wounded men, and several hundred surgeons and nurses, were left to fall into the enemy's hands.

The battle of Savage's Station was fought in the afternoon and evening of this day. In estimating its importance it is to be remembered that the success of General McClellan's

change of base to the James, depended first on his successful passage of the great natural barrier of White Oak Swamp, which, extending over half-way across the Peninsula south of Richmond, lay squarely across his line of retreat. To withdraw an army of 115,000 fighting men from the face of an eager and victorious foe, and to move it with its immense army train of 5,000 wagons through the narrow funnel which afforded the only practicable passage through the swamp, was no child's play. Its accomplishment was perhaps the greatest achievement of McClellan's military career.

SAVAGE'S STATION.

The duty of making a stand in front of the road leading from Savage's Station to the swamp, was undertaken by the faithful Sumner, who was to be (but was not) supported by Heintzelman. If Sumner could hold his ground at the Station the success of the grand movement was largely assured; for the swamp, once passed, would guard the retreat as much as it had hindered the march of the army. Sumner, after giving Magruder's a sharp repulse at Allen's Farm, two miles up the railroad toward Richmond, during the forenoon, fell back and formed his corps in front of Savage's Station, supposing that Heintzelman was taking position on his left. But to his surprise he learned, after the fighting began in the afternoon, that the latter had moved off to the swamp.¹⁶

Slocum's division, of Franklin's corps, had been sent forward to the swamp by General McClellan. General Smith also expected to move his division to and through the swamp that day; but finding in the morning, when he rode with

¹⁶ Heintzelman's excuse for this was that he considered the open ground around Savage's Station too narrow to permit him to deploy his corps, in addition to the other troops thronging into it; and he thought it best to take advantage of the only road leading direct from Savage's Station to White Oak Swamp, while it was open to him. The discovery that he had gone was made by Generals Franklin and Sedgwick, who rode out to the left to find Heintzelman, and were fired on by the enemy's artillery.

General Franklin to the Station to look the ground over, that the position there was insufficiently guarded, he, by General Franklin's direction, disposed his division for a time in front of the Station. This point was guarded by him for two hours. After Sumner arrived with his corps, shortly after noon, Smith started on with his division for White Oak Swamp; but had not gone over two miles on the way when he was recalled by General Sumner, who, left in the lurch by Heintzelman's departure, was glad to make the most of Smith's support. The rear guard at Savage's Station thus consisted of Sumner's corps and Smith's division; and as it happened, all the fighting there done by that division fell to the lot of the Vermont brigade.

The stand of the rear guard at Savage's Station was a notable passage in the history of the Peninsular campaign, and the battle will be ever memorable to Vermonters as that in which one of our regiments, the Fifth, suffered the greatest loss in killed and wounded ever sustained by a Vermont regiment in action.

Fully aware at last of McClellan's purpose and line of retreat, the confederate commanders had been all day of Sunday, June 29th, hurrying forward their forces to strike the portion of his army which should be found on the north side of the swamp. This must fight alone, for the roads from Savage's Station into the swamp were packed with troops, artillery wagons, and herds of cattle, till not another man or animal could be added. Any attack upon or panic in this immense procession would have involved tremendous losses of guns and material. As has been stated, Smith's division arrived first at Savage's Station, and formed line of battle there about one o'clock. Some two hours later, Sumner's corps having arrived and taken position, Smith started for White Oak Swamp. He had proceeded about two miles when the engagement opened at the Station, and he was ordered back by Sumner. Sumner had stationed

one of his two divisions, Richardson's, along the railroad at the Station and to the right of it, and the other, Sedgwick's, in open ground between the railroad and the Williamsburg road. When Smith's division arrived he sent Hancock's brigade to support Richardson on the right, and Brooks's brigade to the left to prolong Sedgwick's line and hold the ground which Heintzelman had been expected to occupy. The Third brigade, commanded by Colonel Taylor, its commander, General Davidson, having had a sunstroke that day, was held in reserve. All the fighting of the battle of Savage's Station was done on the left of the railroad. Richardson's front was threatened but not assaulted, and Hancock for once had nothing to do. On the left, Sedgwick and Brooks repulsed and drove from their front two of Magruder's three divisions; secured the position of Savage's Station for four hours, during which the last of McClellan's army, save the rear guard, made good its retreat into the swamp; and held the ground till they themselves, under cover of the darkness, could follow the rest of the army. Had the Vermont brigade failed to do its duty, Sedgwick would have been flanked and probably cut to pieces, and Richardson and Hancock, taken in detail, might have been destroyed or captured. The columns pouring into White Oak Swamp would have been stampeded; White Oak Bridge would have been seized by the enemy; and the story of the grand change of base would in all human probability have had a very different ending. The details of this service are full of interest.

General Magruder's force in this battle consisted of his own division and the divisions of McLaw's and Jones; and in addition to his field batteries, he had a 32-lb rifled gun, mounted on a railroad platform car, and protected by an iron plated shield. Upon the performance of this "Railroad Merrimac," as the Richmond papers called it, the Confederates had counted not a little; and it did them good service

that day. The battle opened about half past four o'clock P.M., by Magruder's artillery, to which Sedgwick's guns replied. To the roar of these, Smith's division returned to the field. The day was very hot, and the men had been marching or standing under arms all day; but they hurried back at double quick, conscious that they were wanted. General Brooks halted the brigade something over a mile from the field, on the Williamsburg road. His orders were to advance into the woods on the left of the road and push back the enemy, now swarming into the woods in front, in strong force, and threatening to envelop Sedgwick's left. General Brooks formed his command with a line of battle in front, composed of the Fifth Vermont, Lieut. Colonel Grant,¹⁷ on the right, and the Sixth, Colonel Lord, on the left. Supporting these were the Second, Colonel Whiting, and Third, Lieut. Colonel Veazey,¹⁸ each in column by division. Two companies (A. and K.) of the Second Vermont were thrown forward as skirmishers, under command of Lieut. Colonel Walbridge. The Fourth regiment, Colonel Stoughton, was held in reserve, and did not become engaged. General Brooks had little or no aid from the artillery, the Union batteries engaged being all posted on the north of the Williamsburg road. The four regiments first named entered the woods in the order above described, and advanced about half a mile, when the skirmishers engaged the enemy's skirmishers, and drove them back upon their main line. The skirmishers then drew off to the left, and the battle on the south of the Williamsburg road opened in deadly earnest. When it closed each of the Vermont regiments

¹⁷ Colonel Smalley was not with the brigade during this campaign, and at this time was absent on sick leave.

¹⁸ Colonel Hyde was taken sick a day or two before; and Lieut. Colonel Veazey, who had been for a time in command of the Seventy-seventh New York, of Davidson's brigade, was the day previous, at the close of the action at Golding's farm, placed in command of the Third Vermont.

actively engaged had cleared its front of the enemy, and the brigade held its ground till it was withdrawn to join the division on the night march to White Oak Swamp. As the density of the woods and the shadows of the evening, which were already falling as the brigade entered the timber, hid the regiments from each other and to a great extent from the eye of the brigade commander, the fighting was necessarily of a somewhat disconnected and desultory sort. General Brooks was there and did his and received a painful wound but from the nature of the case he could not direct to any considerable extent the details of the fighting of his brigade. Each regimental commander had his order to advance and engage any opposing force; and each the final order to retire. Between these orders, each colonel largely fought his regiment on his own hook; and the work of the brigade can be best described by describing the actions of the several regi-

ments. These will be taken up on the order in which they became engaged.

The Fifth regiment had the right of the line, and at the order to advance pushed into the woods in good shape, its right resting on and directing its course by the Williamsburg road. Soon after entering the woods it marched straight over a Union regiment which had been ordered in shortly before, but had halted in the woods and refused to advance. This was a regiment, which had joined Smith's division several weeks before from General Wool's command. Its men, mostly recruited in the saloons and beer gardens of New York city, made a fine appearance on parade, but proved to be of poor fighting quality. This was their first experience under fire, and they had thrown themselves upon the ground and utterly refused to move. Stepping over them the men of the Fifth marched straight on.¹⁹ The enemy's battery and the railroad monitor were raking the woods through which they must advance with a terrible fire of shell and grape. As they neared the open ground in front they came up with the line of skirmishers, who now withdrew, and in a moment more the line of the Fifth came out into an open field, and confronted the hitherto unseen enemy. In the open ground on the right of the road, Berns's brigade, supported on its left by the First Minnesota, was actively engaged with Kershaw's brigade. In the front of the Fifth was Semmes's brigade in a hollow which almost hid it from view. On a crest beyond, on the Williamsburg road, were Kemper's guns.

In later days and with added experience, Colonel Grant,

¹⁹ "I remember as if it was yesterday the way we tramped over that line of cringing men, cursing them soundly for their cowardice. The same regiment the next day broke at White Oak Swamp, and ran away, and had our brigade not been made of better stuff, Jackson would have forced the crossing at White Oak Bridge. General McClellan had the whole regiment put under guard, and punished officers and men severely."—Statement of Sergeant Lucius Bigelow.

in such a situation, would have halted his regiment in the protection of the woods, thrown out skirmishers, and either awaited the enemy's attack, or at least postponed his own advance till the battery in front had been flanked and dislodged. But it was his first battle, and he did not intend to do any less than he was ordered to do. His order was to advance and push back the enemy, and he obeyed it even too literally. As the regiment pressed straight on, its right soon crossed the Williamsburg road, which here bends a little towards the south, the right company lapping the left of the First Minnesota.²⁰ It advanced till the enemy was visible in the hollow in front. Colonel Grant now ordered a bayonet charge. The Fifth charged on the double quick; and the opposing line broke into the woods on its right and left. Another Confederate infantry line remained beyond the hollow, and, halting his regiment, Grant opened fire upon it. Two volleys were returned, from as many regiments, while Kemper's battery opened with grape and canister, and from the edge of the woods to the left came a cross fire of musketry. The storm of death swept through the ranks of the Fifth with murderous effect. In less time than it take to tell it, the ground was strewn with fallen Vermonters. In twenty minutes every other man in the line of the Fifth was killed or wounded. None but heroes of the stoutest mettle would have held their ground under such circumstances; but refusing its left to avoid the enfilading fire from the woods, and taking advantage of a slight swell of ground and a few scattered trees in front, the Fifth maintained its advanced position, silenced the enemy in its front, and did not fall back until ordered to the rear with the brigade, hours after. The men had sixty rounds of cartridges, and many of them used them all, exchanging their guns as they became heated

²⁰ Some of the men of the First Minnesota fought for a time in the ranks of the Fifth Vermont.

for those of their fallen comrades. Soon after dark, the fire of the enemy wholly ceased, and the Fifth was in undisputed possession of its position. No Vermont regiment ever made a braver fight, or at such fearful cost. The Fifth had in line on that field probably not over 400 muskets. Its loss in killed and wounded was 206—most of whom fell in the first half hour.²¹ The larger portion of the casualties were inflicted by Kemper's battery. Asst. Surgeon Sawin of the Second Vermont, who visited the field next day, says in a letter written soon after: "Thirty men of the Fifth Vermont were found lying side by side, dressed in as perfect a line as for a dress parade, who were all stricken down by one discharge of grape and canister from the enemy's battery."²² Companies E and H suffered especially from the artillery fire. Company E had three commissioned officers and 56 men in line, of whom but seven came out unharmed and of the others twenty-five—lacking one of one-half—were killed or mortally wounded. In the ranks of that company that day stood five brothers, from Manchester, Henry, Hiram, Silas, William and Edward Cummings, with a cousin of the same surname, William H. Cummings, and a brother-in-law, Horace Clayton. Of these seven men six were killed and

²¹ We could not, allowing for skirks and feeble men, blown by double-quicking, have carried more than 400 muskets into battle. We lost in twenty minutes 206 men, killed and wounded. In spite of this awful loss the regiment held its ground and quelled the fire of the enemy; and it was difficult to make the men understand why they should retreat after dark; for they felt that they had held their ground and won the day."—Statement of Sergeant Lucius Bigelow.

²² This scene, so sad to Union eyes, was visited, and of course viewed with different feelings, by many Confederate officers. In his article on McClellan's Change of Base, in the *Century Magazine* for July, 1885, General D. H. Hill says of it: "About half a mile from the Station (Savage's) we saw what seemed to be an entire regiment of Federals cold in death, and learned that a Vermont regiment had made a desperate charge upon the division of McLaws, and had been almost annihilated."

one severely wounded.²³ Such fatality in one family in one battle, was probably without a parallel in the war.

Kemper's battery had fired three rounds before the Fifth could reply. Two companies then gave their attention especially to the battery, which about this time, being threatened by the advance of the rest of the Vermont brigade and left unsupported by the retreat of the Confederate infantry, ceased firing and withdrew, and was not heard from again that night.

The experience of the other three regiments was less severe. All advanced together, but found it difficult to keep their lines dressed in the woods, or to hold their direction. The Sixth started forward with the Fifth, but bore more to the left. It was at one time in great danger, as the enemy lapped its line, and a Confederate regiment moved in the twilight to its left and rear; but this retreated after firing a volley. Musket balls and grapeshot flew thickly through the woods, and over sixty of the men fell without seeing their opponents. The Sixth held its position in the woods till the enemy retired from its front, and till the brigade was withdrawn.

The Second regiment was still moving in column by division, when, its front having been uncovered by the divergence of the regiments in front, it suddenly came under fire from the enemy's batteries in front and halted. Colonel Whiting's order at this juncture, was to "charge bayonets!"²⁴ This being a movement not known to the tactics, as the regiment was then closed in mass, the men stood still. His next

²³ The survivor was the oldest of the brothers, Henry. He had a serious wound in the thigh, and was discharged six months after by a special order of the Secretary of War. William Cummings suffered amputation of the thigh, and did not survive the operation.

²⁴ Statement of Colonel Whiting, who frankly admits that for the moment he was "at his wits end."

command was to cheer, and this was lustily obeyed.²⁵ The regiment was then partially deployed, and the front line returned the enemy's fire coming from the woods in front. The regiment was subsequently withdrawn to a cross road, where it remained till the brigade retired. Of the casualties in the Second regiment about half took place among the skirmishers.

The Third regiment started forward in rear of the Sixth in column by division; but in marching through the woods, as was the case with each regiment, lost sight of the other regiments. It probably bore to the left of the Sixth till its front was uncovered. As it advanced it came under a lively artillery fire which, however, damaged the trees more than the men. In accordance with his orders, Lieut. Colonel Veazey now employed the regiment into line and kept on till suddenly from the thick woods in front, about forty yards away, came a challenge: "Who are you?" Some one in the line of the Third answered, "The Third Vermont." The prompt reply to this was a volley of musketry, which took effect principally on the left of the Third, cutting down Captain Corbin commanding the left company, Company C, and nearly half of the men of that company in the line. The Third returned the first, at the same time, by Colonel Veazey's order, cheering loudly, and the opposing regiment, which was the Fifth Louisiana, of Semmes's brigade, unable to see what force was before it, and fearing, as some of the rebels were heard to say to each other, that it would be flanked or cut off, retreated without staying upon the order of its going, and was seen and heard no more that night. The Third maintained its position till ordered back, an hour later. After the enemy's fire in front had slackened, and it was be-

²⁵ "That command to cheer I lay up as the best act performed by me during my service. Only soldiers can estimate what a cheer may accomplish, when matters seem to be on the balance."—Statement of Colonel Whiting.

coming dark in the woods, Major Walbridge, who, with a portion of the skirmishers, was at the extreme left of the line of the brigade, heard troops moving still farther to the left. Surmising that it might be a Union regiment coming up to extend the line, he rode out towards them and hailed them with the question: "What troops are those?" They at once halted, and a voice replied: "Who are you?" Walbridge repeated: "What regiment is that?" Again the voice replied: "You tell!" followed by the order: "Ready!" Before the order to fire, which followed, came, Walbridge had wheeled his horse, put spurs to him, and with his head bent down to his saddlebow, was dashing away through the underbrush. The bullets rattled around him; but he was not hurt. General Brooks, however, who was also riding to the left at that time to learn what the going on there, was wounded in the calf of their the right leg by this volley. The Confederate regiment fell back at once after firing.

The loss of the brigade at Savage's Station was 358, as follows:

	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Died of wounds.	Total.
Second Vermont	5	43	0	3	48
Third	6	18	0	0	24
Fourth	0	0	5 sick in hosp.	0	5
Fifth	45	158	3 sick in hosp.	27	206
Sixth	15	51	9 sick in hosp.	6	75
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	71	270	17	36	358

A number of additional "missing" were reported at that time; but included among them were 14 men detailed to remain as nurses with the sick and wounded. The rest, for the most part belonged in the list of killed. Three brave young officers, Lieutenants Sumner and Comstock of the Fifth and Ramsay of the Third, were among the killed; and the list of wounded comprised eleven commissioned officers.²⁶ The

²⁶ Captains Corbin and Nelson of the Third, Captains Benton, Jenne and Seager, and Lieutenants Barber, Peck, Smith, Wilson and Wright of the Fifth, and Lieutenant Wood of the Sixth.

loss was not all on one side. Kershaw lost 290 men, some of whom, no doubt, fell from the fire of the Vermont troops. General Semmes, who, as his report shows, had four regiments, the Tenth and Fifty-third Georgia, Fifth Louisiana, and Thirty-second Virginia, (with two more, Fifteenth Virginia and Tenth Louisiana, in reserve) opposed to the Third and Sixth Vermont, admits severe loss in the Tenth Georgia. Semmes says that "no less than four hundred of the enemy's dead were found on the field the next morning," in front of three regiments of his brigade; and that "more than one hundred of the dead enemy" were counted on the field immediately in front of the Fifth Louisiana. How wild these assertions are may be seen from the fact that the Fifth Louisiana, by Semmes's account, was engaged with no regiment but the Third Vermont,²⁷ and the killed of the Third were five! A like discount of ninety-five per cent must be made in his statement of the number of Union dead in front of his brigade. This did not hold its position: but, as his report shows, marched back to its camp an hour and a half before the Vermont brigade left the field. If General Semmes's statement of his own loss is as wide of the truth, a considerable addition may be made to the Confederate loss in his brigade.²⁸

It may be mentioned here that the Union soldiers wounded and captured at Savage's Station suffered much from want of care, though the less severely wounded did their

²⁷ "Discovering troops not more than forty yards in front, I directed Private Maddox, Co. K, Fifth Louisiana, to advance and challenge "Who are you?" to which the reply was "Friends." Hearing this I demanded: "What regiment?" and was answered: "Third Vermont." Whereupon the order was given to commence firing."—Semmes's report.

²⁸ As the aggregate of casualties in the seven days battles, on both sides, generally comprise several engagements, it is difficult to allot the losses accurately. Confederate reports seem to admit a loss of about 1,000 more than the Union losses in the action at Savage's Station.

best to relieve the more helpless sufferers. "We were obliged to neglect many," says P. H. Taylor, a member of the First Minnesota, who, himself wounded, acted as a volunteer nurse, "and maggots filled nearly every wound that came under my observation."²⁹ "You must do the best you can for your wounded," said Stonewall Jackson to Mr. Taylor: "we've got all we want to do to follow up your army." A number of Vermonters died in the field hospitals at Savage's Station. The survivors were sent to Richmond.

"This day's operations," says the Comte de Paris, "were a great success for McClellan. The first and most difficult step in his retreat movement was taken and with fortunate results. He had succeeded in placing White Oak Swamp between his army and the main body of his adversaries, and in surmounting this serious obstacle without losing either a cannon or a vehicle."³⁰ All the efforts of the enemy to effect a rout in his rear-guard had been repulsed with loss." Sedgwick and Brooks did the fighting by which this result was secured. Magruder and his division generals evidently realized the importance of those closing hours of the 29th of June. Their attempt to destroy Sumner was pressed with ardor and high hope; and but for the steadiness of the Vermont brigade, which for four hours held back double its numbers, without yielding to them a foot of ground, it would have been successful. General Sumner was for staying at Savage's. "No, General," he said to General Franklin, "you

²⁹ "In spite of all my precautions, my wound became maggoty; and there is no describing the misery I was in. How to remove them was a puzzle; but I obtained some spirits of turpentine, which others were using for the same purpose, and placing my leg in the right position I turned in the turpentine, letting it pass entirely through the wound, which had the effect of clearing out the wound and the maggots also."—Diary of Lucius D. Savage, Company F, Second Vermont, wounded in the leg at Savage's Station.

³⁰ This is not quite correct. Mott lost a gun at White Oak Bridge, and the batteries attached to McCall's division lost fourteen guns at Glendale.

shall not go, nor will I go. I never leave a victorious field. Why, if I had 20,000 more men I would crush this rebellion!"³¹ But he was finally convinced by Franklin and Smith and by Lieutenant Berry of Smith's staff, who had seen General McClellan but a short time before, that the latter expected all of his army to cross the swamp that night, and he reluctantly permitted the division commanders to give the necessary orders.

WHITE OAK SWAMP.

About ten o'clock that evening, Smith's division resumed the retreat. Leaving the dead on the field and the wounded who were not able to march, some in a blacksmith's shop and others under rude shelters of boughs, in charge of Surgeons Russell of the Fifth and Sawin of the Second, who, with several hospital attendants were left to care for them and share their captivity, the brigade marched with the division for White Oak Swamp. The night was dark; but numerous fires, built by teamsters and stragglers in the pine woods along the road, lit up the line of march. Sick and wounded men, many using their guns as crutches, staggered in long procession after the column. The road was filled with wagons, ambulances and artillery, mingled with the troops. Throngs of stragglers, of other organizations, hung upon the rear of the brigade, and pressed into the ranks of the regiments when they halted; and it was with difficulty that any organization was preserved. All night long the march continued. Shortly after daylight, on the 30th, the division crossed White Oak Bridge and halted on the other side of the creek, where it was to make a second stand, to cover the retreat of the army. The bridge was destroyed in the morning after the last trains and troops had crossed. Ayres's, Mott's and Wheeler's batteries were posted to command the

³¹ Century Magazine, Vol. XXX., p. 463.

crossing, and the division was stationed in the woods and open ground near by. The Vermont brigade, after several changes of position, halted in an open field, skirted by a belt of trees, near the bridge. Hundreds of army wagons were parked in the field. Officers and men, exhausted by the excitement and fatigue of the previous day and night, stretched themselves on the grass, and sank into sleep. They had slept for several hours when their rest was rudely broken. Stonewall Jackson, having effected a crossing of the Chickahominy the evening previous, at the Grapevine Bridge, which he had to rebuild, had pushed on in pursuit of the Union column till, about the middle of the forenoon, his advance was checked at White Oak Bridge, by finding the bridge one, and Smith's division posted on the opposite bank. The inequalities of the ground on the north side enabled him to approach without discovery within easy artillery range, and he quietly brought forward seven field batteries to the brow of the hill, which commanded the field in which the Vermont troops lay and most of the ground around. The guns were hidden by the underbrush, and their presence was not discovered by a man of Smith's command. Accounts differ as to the number of Jackson's guns in battery. Colonel Crutchfield, his chief of artillery, says, in his report of the affair: "I found it possible with a little work, to pen a way through the woods to the right of the road on which we advanced, by which our guns could be brought, unseen by the enemy, in position behind the crest of the hill on this side, about one thousand yards from the enemy's batteries. Seven batteries, in all 23 guns, were accordingly ordered up. * * * About fifteen minutes of two P.M., we opened on the enemy, who had no previous intimation of our position and intention." General Jackson in his report says the number of guns so used was twenty-eight. General D. H. Hill says there were thirty-one guns upon the bluff—26 from his division and five from Whiting's division.

Either number was quite enough to satisfy the troops exposed to their fire. For these, the opening bellow of the cannonade was the first note of warning, and before they realized what it mean the air was full of whizzing missiles which plunged with exceeding carelessness among the troops, knocking mules and wagons to pieces, and making bad work among the battery men and horses.³² General Franklin says of this bombardment: "It commenced with a severity which I never heard equaled in the field." The scene presented for a few moments after, is thus described by Surgeon Stevens of the Seventy-seventh New York: "Unutterable confusion prevailed for a time; riderless horses galloped madly to the rear; officers wandered without commands, and men were left without directions how to act. Generals Smith and Davidson occupied an old fashioned wooden house, which stood upon the brow of the elevation above and facing the bridge. About it were many orderlies, holding their horses. The first volley riddled the house with shells. The gray-haired owner of the house (Mr. Britton) was cut in two as he stood in the door, and several other persons were injured. General Smith, at the moment the cannonade opened, was engaged at his rude toilet; his departure from the house was so hasty that he left his watch, which he did not recover. He coolly walked to a less exposed position and devoted himself to restoring order." In this confusion the Vermont regiments shared to the extent of breaking for the nearest shelter. But they rallied at once behind the screen of timber, under the efforts of some of the regimental and staff officers who retained their coolness, at a time when some undeniably brave officers entirely lost their self-possession. And when General Brooks rode slowly up on his iron-gray horse, and came out through the skirt of the woods into

³² Wheeler's battery suffered severely, four of his guns being disabled by loss of artillerymen and horses; and one of Mott's guns was left behind when the division moved on.

sight of his men, they welcomed him with a cheer and fell into line with a degree of promptness which was remarkable proof of their courage and discipline. Brooks threw out a line of skirmishers into the clearing, and a firm front, which was not again broken that day, was soon presented to the enemy.

Soon after their rally of the brigade in the pine timber, through which the hostile shells still flew thickly, the Third Vermont, Lieut. Colonel Veazey, was ordered to the left, to reinforce the Third brigade, and was warmly welcomed by General Davidson, who posted it to cover his right flank. Next it on the left, was a large and fine looking regiment. The little episode which followed is best told in Colonel Veazey's words: "The enemy was shelling the woods severely but harmlessly in the main. I went to our right to deploy one or two companies to cover my right flank, there being no troops beyond us. When I rode back, I found the regiment on our left had disappeared. Upon inquiry of my men there, they said: 'Oh, they all ran away. They could not stand the shelling of the pine trees.'³³ Instead of feeling alarm at being left alone, in expectation of a rebel attack, the men of the Third treated the running away of that regiment as a joke on them; and seemed to feel perfectly competent to take care of all the rebels in the Confederacy. I don't think it occurred to any man in the line to leave because others had left. When I reported the situation to General Davidson, who was a nervous, outspoken Virginian, a regular army officer, his disgust at the conduct of his own men was only equaled by his admiration of the conduct of the Third; and the compliments he passed upon Vermont troops were too vehement to bear repeating. These and other things showed that

³³ "My troops formed on the new line well, except the Twentieth New York, who lost their formation."—Report of General John W. Davidson—a very mild description of the conduct of the regiment named.

even at that early day the Vermont troops were highly regarded by other commanders."

Jackson's attempt to stampede the rear guard at White Oak Bridge thus failed. His artillery kept up its firing at intervals all day; but his cavalry and skirmishers were driven back whenever they appeared, and he was compelled to halt for the day on the north side of the creek, though he was greatly needed at Glendale, but three miles away to the south-west, where Longstreet and A. P. Hill were making a desperate effort to cut in two the retreating Union column. Jackson has been much blamed by writers on both sides for remaining comparatively quiet all that day, in plain hearing of Longstreet's guns. He said, in his report, that he was "eager to press forward;" but that the destruction of the bridge and the strong position of the enemy prevented his advancing till next morning. It was the firm front held by Smith's division which deterred him; and largely in consequence of the service thus rendered, the mass of the Army of the Potomac was able to reach Malvern Hill, without serious stoppage or disaster.

The brigade resumed its march to the James that (Monday) night, about eleven o'clock.³⁴ At that hour General Smith drew his division out quietly from its lines, without the knowledge of the enemy, the Confederate pickets being deceived by false orders, shouted within their hearing by the Union officers. In this march the Sixth corps moved by a comparatively unused road, two miles south of the Quaker road over which the main portion of the army moved. This road had been explored by a member of General Smith's staff during the day previous, and found to be practicable.

³⁴ In the official lists of battles and engagements of the Vermont troops, printed by Adj. General Washburn in his report for 186, the date attached to White Oak Swamp is "June 30th to July 2d." This is partly incorrect. The brigade moved through White Oak Swamp in the night of the 30th, and no fighting was done by any troops in White Oak Swamp on the 1st and 2d of July.

"The discovery of this road," says General Franklin,³⁵ "made the concentration of the troops at Malvern Hill a completed manœuvres by non of the 1st of July, and was due to the fertile brain of General Smith, who ordered the exploration." "That night," says General D. H. Hill, "Franklin glided silently by Longstreet and A. P. Hill. He had to pass within easy range of their artillery ;but they did not know he was there." The troops of Smith's division, exhausted as they were by want of rest and food, pushed on through the night hours, till soon after daylight Tuesday morning their eyes were gladdened by the sight of the main army, not retreating but faced about and taking position for a final stand on the slopes of Malvern Hill.

The route they had come by brought the corps out on the right of the army, as the lines faced the enemy, and it was posted on the east and south of the hill, and on the right of the semicircle of bayonets which encircled Malvern Hill from Turkey Island Creek on the south round to the James on the west. The left of Smith's division rested on the southern side of the hill, with Richardson's division of Sumner's corps on its left, and Slocum's division on its right. The men sank in their tracks when finally halted, and were allowed to sleep for three hours; when they were again aroused, and after some changes of position, in the arrangement of the lines, were faced into lien of battle for the final conflict of the seven days of fighting, now gathering on the left and front. The tides of Confederate valor which surged that afternoon up the slopes of Malvern Hill, to be swept back by the resistless fire of the Union artillery and infantry, though rolling heavily against the left and centre, did not reach the front of the Vermont brigade, or of any portion of the Sixth corps; and the part of the brigade in the victory of Malvern Hill, was confined to standing wearily in the lines from ten

³⁵ Century Magazine, Vol. XXX, p. 467.

in the morning till eleven at night. With senses partially dulled by the exhaustion following the fatigues and excitements of the preceding six days and nights³⁶ the men listened to the thunder of the strife upon their left, and wondered dreamily what the result was to be. At nine o'clock in the evening Lee withdrew his shattered divisions, and soon after General McClellan rode down the lines amid the cheers of the men, and the cheerful word was passed along that the enemy had been beaten back at all points with tremendous slaughter. Yet the night brought little rest for the troops. Strong as was the position at Malvern Hill and Turkey Bend, the naval officers decided that the James was not wide enough there to allow them to protect the supply transports from attack from the opposite bank, and McClellan ordered a further withdrawal of the army to Harrison's Landing, seven miles to the south. Smith's division was to bring up the rear, and was drawn out from its lines during the night, moving only enough to prevent sleep for the men. Having to wait for the other troops to pass, it did not fairly take up its line of march for Harrison's Landing till nearly dawn. The division pickets during the day previous had been detailed from the Third Vermont, and at nightfall General Smith informed Colonel Veazey of the Third that he was to hold the picket line during the night with a few cavalry videttes on the roads in his front. His orders were to stand fast and fight anything and everything that appeared till the division had been gone for two hours. His was then to draw in his men and follow the column, driving up all the stragglers, and destroying any abandoned arms found along the route. It was a responsible duty, and became somewhat

³⁶ "In General Smith's division every march [of the Seven Days] was made at night. The nervous excitement of being under fire every day for nearly a week, often without an opportunity of returning the fire, has caused a prostration, from which in many cases the men have not yet recovered."—General Franklin's Report, July 17th.

trying in the course of the night, when the cavalry videttes came tearing in and report the enemy advancing in force. This, however, proved to be a false report. The Confederate generals were, in fact, thinking that night of measures to protect Richmond, in case McClellan should resume the offensive, rather than of further pursuit, and the retreat of the division and of the army was unmolested.

The march from Malvern Hill to Harrison's Landing was the saddest and weariest march of its length in the history of the brigade. The rain poured in torrents; the wagons and artillery had poached the roads into canals of mud; the stouter men could hardly drag one foot after another; and the weaker fell out by undress, some to die of exhaustion, and others to join the long caravan of stragglers. Colonel Veazey, describing this march, says: "No person can give any conception of the wake of a retreating army after such a campaign in such a country. It simply beggared description. Stragglers sick and dying, arms of every description, stores of all kinds, abandoned wagons, broken down horse and mules, mud so deep that no bottom could be reached. All these at every step; and then add the sickening feeling of defeat and retreat, and the momentary expectation of a rear attack, and no help within reach. Weary, hungry, exhausted, sick, what torment could be added, except the loss of honor? Such was our dreary march as a rear guard to Harrison's Landing. But fortunately everything has an end.; and more dead than alive we found the end of that march at last. But it was only to find a bivouac in water and mud, without fire or rations until the next day; and even then, early in the morning the Third regiment was ordered out to repel an attack upon the picket line, and went with scarcely a murmur." The Vermont troops marched in better order than many others; but endurance had nearly reached its limit, when, in the afternoon of July 2d, they moved through

the last piece of woods skirting the plateau about Harrison's Landing, and came out in sight of the river. It was a glad sight, for its surface was covered with gunboats and transports, whose presence meant rest and rations. The men dropped on the soaked ground, at the first halt, and sank to sleep. The Fourth regiment was sent out that night to picket the line in front of the division; and the rest of the brigade bivouacked for the night in the mud without food or fires.³⁷ Next morning a few shells were thrown into the camp of the division by General "Jeb" Stuart, who with his cavalry and a light battery had followed on the rear of the army. He was speedily driven away; but it was thought best to move the division a short distance to a less exposed position; and it went into camp during the forenoon on Ruffin's farm, two miles north of Harrison's Landing. Here it remained during the six weeks of sickly, dreary and monotonous camp life, which characterized the stay of the army at Harrison's Landing.

On the 4th of July—not an altogether cheerful anniversary of the nation's birthday—the brigade was reviewed, with the division, by General McClellan; and on the 8th it was again paraded to receive President Lincoln. It was about dark before he reached the Vermont brigade, which had been in line, awaiting him, for hours; but the men had voice and spirit enough to give him three cheers and a "tiger."

Extensive earthworks were now thrown up to guard the position; the woods were slashed and cleared for many acres in front, and lines of abatis were constructed. The camp hospitals were soon overcrowded with sick men. Many

³⁷ "We lost our knapsacks and clothing and tents, and we have to sleep without any covering at night, in a wet open field, and mud, mud, up to our knees. If we lie down in it, we can hardly get up again. The d—n cusses got my prayer-book; but I don't care for that. May it convert the fellow that got it. The rebel capital must be ours, cost what it may."—Letter of an Irish soldier, in a Vermont regiment, from Harrison's Landing.

died in camp. Hundreds languished in the government hospitals. Other hundreds were discharged with broken constitutions. Many received leaves of absence and went home to recruit their health. The rest remained and made their condition as tolerable as possible, by digging wells to give them better water than that of the streams and swamps, and providing shades of pine trees for their shelter tents. So they patiently awaited the next movement.

General McClellan, having been heavily reinforced, was not contemplating, among other things, a crossing of the James and a fresh movement on Richmond by the way of Petersburg, when he was ordered by the authorities at Washington to withdraw from the Peninsula, and to come up near Washington to co-operate with General Pope's command. The army thereupon marched to Fortress Monroe, whence it was to be taken by water to Alexandria. The Sixth corps remained in its lines at Harrison's Landing for two days after the movement commenced, while the rest of the army, with a wagon train twenty-five miles long, was filing out for the march down the Peninsula, and then brought up the rear.³⁸

In this march the Vermont brigade started with Smith's division, on the 16th of August, with six days cooked rations; bivouacked near Charles City Court House that night, and after two pretty hard days march in the host sun reached the Chickahominy about sundown of the 17th. It crossed at Barrett's Ferry, a mile above its mouth, by the long pontoon bridge over which the army had been streaming for two days, and halted for the night on the left bank. Another day's march, still under a burning sun, brought the division to Williamsburg, once the capital of the Old Dominion. Passing through its street, past the old buildings of William and Mary College at one end, and the ruins of the old capitol at the other, the division halted for the

³⁸ "It was forty-five hours after the first team passed, till our brigade, next to the last, passed out."—Colonel Whiting's Statement.

night on the battlefield of three months before. The next day's march brought it to Yorktown, where it encamped near the York river on the lines which Porter's division had fortified during the thirty days siege. Another clear, hot, dusty day, during which many tired men fell out of the ranks, and the brigade reached Big Bethel. Another hard march on the 21st, brought the brigade back, after five months absence, to the vicinity of the desolated village of Hampton, and the next day, after seven hours of waiting on the beach of Fortress Monroe, the brigade embarked on transports with the Sixth Corps, and steamed for Alexandria. The voyage up the river was a pleasant change, in spite of the crowded condition of the transports. The tired men became rested; the health of the command had improved on the march down the Peninsula, under the addition of fruit, principally of green plums and peaches, to their army diet; and while their thin and bronzed faces and ragged clothing told of hard service, and the campaign had left little of the exultant feeling with which they entered upon it five months before, the spirit of the Vermonters was good. They were conscious that they had fought well, in advance and in retreat, and that no part of the reverses of the army could be laid at their door; and they were about as ready as ever to march or fight, when the order should come, though they understood better than before what marching and fighting meant. The brigade disembarked at Alexandria in the afternoon of Sunday, August 24th, marched through the city to a field a mile to the west, near Fort Ellsworth, and remained there till August 29th.