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CHAPTER XIV.
THE FIRST BRIGADE — CONTINUED.

General Hooker takes command—Reorganization of the army—Sedgwick succeeds Smith as commander of the Sixth Corps — The new brigade commander, Colonel Grant —The Chancellorsville Campaign—The Sixth Corps crosses the Rappahannock at Fredericksburg—Marye's Heights—Brilliant part of the Vermont brigade—Salem Heights and Bank's Ford—Details of the fighting of the Vermont regiments—The brigade covers the recrossing of the Sixth Corps—Losses of the Vermont troops—Return to White Oak Church.

General Hooker's first work, as commander of the army, was reorganization. The grand divisions, which had proved unwieldy and useless, were abolished. The corps organizations remained; but new corps commanders were assigned to all of them except the First and Second, which retained their old commanders, Reynolds and Couch. The Ninth corps was detached from the army and sent to North Carolina, and General William F. Smith was assigned to its command. Division commanders, selected for their fighting qualities, were advanced to the commands of the other corps. The Eleventh and Twelfth corps, which had been detached under Burnside, were brought back to the Army of the Potomac. As thus reorganized the army consisted of the First corps, Reynolds; Second, Couch; Third, Sickles; Fifth, Meade; Sixth, Sedgwick; Eleventh, Howard; and Twelfth, Slocum. General Howe remained in the command of the Second division, Sixth Corps, of which the Vermont brigade was a part.

This period was one of rapid improvement in the tone and condition of the army. The depression which followed

the useless slaughter of Fredericksburg, soon passed away. General Hooker almost stopped desertions, which had become fearfully numerous, improved the efficiency of the staff and administrative service, consolidated and reorganized the cavalry arm, which now began to show its value; adopted master and commissary departments to a wonderful pitch of efficiency, and adopted an improved ambulance system, which has been a model for the armies of other nations.¹ In these and other ways he showed the army that it had at its head a man of more than common energy and administrative abilities. His courage and fighting qualities had been demonstrated at Williamsburg, Glendale, Malvern Hill, the Second Bull Run, and Antietam. The defects in his character and insufficiency for chief command were unknown. His appearance and bearing were prepossessing; and as he rode along the lines on his splendid white horse, about the handsomest as he was the most conspicuous soldier in the army, every man in the ranks felt sure that the army now had a commander who would lead it to victory.

The Sixth Corps was sorry to lose General Smith; but it soon learned to consider itself fortunate in his successor. Bred to arms, John Sedgwick had served with distinction in the Mexican war, had been placed in responsible commands by McClellan, had won for his division the reputation of being the best division in Sumner's corps, and had especially distinguished himself by his sturdy fight against heavy odds at Antietam. Bluff, reticent, utterly without ostentation, the officers and men under him came to realize that his blue blouse and coarse army pantaloons covered a true man and a brave soldier—who knew his business and cared to know no more; who meant to do his duty and expected those under him to do theirs. Under him the Sixth Corps won its rank

¹ Originated by Dr. Letterman, medical director of the Army of the Potomac.

as the best corps in the army—a title so often given to it by others, that it is not surprising that its members came to accept it as a true one.

General Howe, as has been said, was an excellent division commander, and was growing in the respect and confidence of his command.

A good many changes of command had been taking place in the Vermont brigade. Within the six weeks between December 18th, 1862, and February 9th, 1863, the remaining three of the original colonels of the brigade, Whiting, Hyde and Lord, together with Lieut. Colonel Joyce, commanding the Second regiment, had resigned and retired to private life; and before the resumption of active operations in the spring, Colonel Tuttle of the Sixth resigned. The removals of subordinate officers by death, disease and discharge had been so numerous that at the end of the first fifteen months of the existence of the brigade, on the 1st of March, 1863, there had been an entire change of the field and staff of every regiment, while of the fifty original captains in the line, but six remained.² On the retirement of Colonel Whiting, which took place February 9th, 1863, Colonel Lewis A. Grant of the Fifth, as the ranking colonel, succeeded to the command of the brigade.

Colonel Grant had as yet his mark to make as a brigade commander. Entering the service with no military training or experience, he had by diligent study thoroughly mastered the Regulations, and gave a degree of attention to details which some thought excessive, though by others it was considered worthy of praise. He had shown courage, energy and industry in the command of the Fifth regiment. With his accession to the command of the brigade regular and reasonably full reports of engagements and movements began to be made; and he took hold of the duties of his new

² Captains Pratt, Platt, Addison Brown and Laird of the Fourth Vermont; Captain Jenne of the Fifth, and Captain Hutchinson of the Sixth.

position in a way that gave promise—which his career fulfilled—that the brigade would have in him, if not a highly popular commander, a vigilant, trusty and capable one, in camp and on the battlefield.

The commanders of the regiments were, of the Second, Colonel James H. Walbridge; Third, Colonel Thomas O. Seaver; Fourth, Colonel Charles B. Stoughton; Fifth, Lieut. Colonel John R. Lewis; Sixth, Colonel Elisha L. Barney. All of these had risen, by successive promotions, from the line. Each had shown bravery and capacity in subordinate commands, and each had the respect and confidence of the officers and men under him.

The later months of the winter of 1862-3 were passed by the brigade in the camp near White Oak Church. There was abundance of cold weather with occasional snow storms up to the end of March and even into April, and at times considerable sickness prevailed, as shown by the long lists of Vermont soldiers in the regimental and Philadelphia hospitals. But the health of the brigade improved steadily through the winter months, and was rarely better than it was when the spring campaign of 1863 began.

One of the chief events of the winter was a notable snow-ball battle. The Third and Fourth Vermont regiments were challenged by the Twenty-sixth New Jersey, which numbered as many men as both the others, to meet them on the mimic battlefield. Snow-balling was a favorite amusement with the Jerseymen, and they had become especially proficient in it; but their challenge was accepted by the Vermont boys, and the contest took place on the 25th of February. An immense multitude of spectators gathered to witness it from the camps around. The opposing lines were marshaled by their line and field officers, the latter mounted. Skirmishers were thrown out, followed by attacks and counter attacks in line. The game ended in the capture by the Vermont boys of the colonel, adjutant and quartermaster of

the New Jersey regiment, all finely mounted, and the utter rout of the Jerseymen. It was a piece of boy's play; but it made about as much stir, at the time, as a serious battle.

The five Vermont regiments, on the 15th of April, 1863, aggregated 3,343 officers and men, with 2,796 present for duty. The Army of the Potomac, on the same date, number 113,000 infantry and artillery and 12,000 cavalry; and perhaps General Hooker was not far out of the way when he called it "the finest army on the planet." General Lee's army was less numerous. The rolls of the Army of Northern Virginia on the 30th of March, 1863, showed an aggregate of 60,298 men. It is to be noted, however, in regard to all statements of numbers on the Southern side, that it is known that in special emergencies occurring on Southern soil, in addition to numbers officially reported by the Confederate commanders, considerable numbers of irregular troops and volunteers for temporary service took part, which do not appear on the army rolls. There is little doubt, also, that the statements of losses on the Confederate side, in battles fought on Southern soil, were often under the truth, even in cases where there was any intention to state it, owing to the facts that losses among such temporary volunteers were not reported, and that many wounded Confederates wandered off and sought shelter and perhaps died in the houses of friendly inhabitants of the country around the battlefields, and were never reported in any lists of casualties. Intelligent residents in Virginia since the war, state their belief that in many cases a considerable percentage should be added to the official statements of Confederate numbers and losses, on these accounts.

On the 3d of April the brigade was reviewed with the Sixth Corps by General Hooker, and on the 8th, President Lincoln, accompanied by General Hooker and a great cavalcade of generals and staff officers, reviewed the Third, Fifth and Sixth Corps. The other three corps were reviewed the

next day. The paymasters paid off the regiments about this time. The weather became warm and the roads more passable; and orders to send all extra clothing and camp equipage to Alexandria, in the first week in April, indicated that the spring campaign was at hand. Yet the men were busy in grading their camps and shading the company streets with evergreens as if for a long stay, when, on the 14th of April, the orders came to make ready to move. These orders had some new features;—officers were allowed one valise apiece and shelter tents, to be carried on pack mules, instead of unlimited baggage and A tents carried in wagons; and the men were to carry eight day's rations—three in their haversacks, and five in their knapsacks—leaving little room for anything else. Something more than a holiday excursion was evidently on foot, and the prospect of active operations was welcomed by most of the army. A long storm delayed the proposed movement for two weeks.

The Chancellorsville campaign began in earnest on the 27th of April. Hooker's plan was to move against Lee's left with four corps,³ by a side detour, crossing the Rappahannock at Kelley's Ford, twenty-seven miles above Fredericksburg; while Sedgwick with two corps,⁴ was to force a crossing at Fredericksburg, and make a demonstration against the Confederate position along the Heights.

The crossing and march of the main column was effected with surprising celerity; and on the night of Thursday, April 30th, Hooker's headquarters were at Chancellorsville—a single brick house at a cross-roads—and he had taken 50,000 men with him to the rear of the very centre of Lee's fortified

³ These in the course of the movement and battle were followed by two more corps.

⁴ Reduced afterwards to one.

line. Meantime pontoon bridges had been thrown across the river below Fredericksburg, at the point where Franklin crossed in December, and a mile below. The First and Sixth Corps had marched to the river; and a division of each corps—Brooks's of the Sixth and Wadsworth's of the First—crossed to guard the bridge heads. The other divisions of both corps remained on the northern bank, where they lay on Friday while Hooker was pushing reconnoitring columns out towards Fredericksburg. On Saturday, Hooker having by this time discovered that Lee had no intention of retreating, the First corps was withdrawn and moved to Chancellorsville, leaving Sedgwick with only his own corps to operate against the enemy's right. Between six and seven o'clock that evening, Stonewall Jackson, making a circuit to the west, struck and stampeded the Eleventh corps, on the extreme right of Hooker's line, and an hour later fell mortally wounded in the dusk of the evening, with three bullet holes through him.⁵ That evening Howe's division of the Sixth Corps crossed to the south bank. On Sunday morning Sedgwick stormed Marye's Heights, in which brilliant achievement the Vermont brigade won immortal fame; and in the afternoon marched out to Salem Heights, back of Fredericksburg, to menace General Lee's rear. Lee, in the meantime, had been forcing the fighting at Chancellorsville, and had taken the cross-roads, pushing Hooker's lines back to the north. Hooker had been stunned by the concussion of a cannon ball, which struck a pillar of the Chancellorsville house against which he was leaning, and the Union army was for a time without a head. In general, affairs were in such a condition that Lee could afford to, and did, detach a strong force from his front to meet Sedgwick Sunday afternoon. Sedgwick carried the crest at Salem Church but could not hold it; and the next day, Lee

⁵ It will never be known whether he was wounded by his own men or by the Union troops. He was between the lines, and both were firing. The Union fire killed one of the men who bore him away.

having further strengthened the force opposed to him, he was forced back, though resisting obstinately, to the river, at Banks's Ford, four miles above Fredericksburg. But he gave his assailants a bloody recoil at the close of the day, and that night the Sixth Corps re-crossed the Rappahannock. The next night, Hooker, who had been doing no fighting since Sunday noon, though he had with him more men who had not drawn a trigger than there were in Lee's entire army, and though he ought to have been glad to be attacked in the impregnable position he had taken, also re-crossed the river, leaving his 12,000 killed and wounded, 14 guns and nearly 20,000 small arms to the enemy.

It is not necessary to the purpose of this history to describe the portion of this famous double battle that was conducted under Hooker's immediate command, or near his headquarters. The mysterious strategy therein displayed has raised the questions, why a soldier of Hooker's energy waited for two days to be attacked on the tangled and unfavorable ground of Chancellorsville, thus losing all he had gained by the celerity of his movement across the Rappahannock; why he did not occupy, as he could easily have done, the favorable ground commanding Banks's Ford, thus bringing his wings twelve miles nearer to each other, and almost uniting them; why he permitted half of his force in the field at Chancellorsville to be worsted on Sunday, while the other half stood unemployed; why he allowed Sedgwick to be outnumbered and enveloped without the slightest diversion in his favor or attempt to reinforce him; why, when physical incapacity was added to mental, he did not relinquish the command to some one else. These are questions which have perplexed far abler military critics than the writer of this history, and he is glad not to be called on to explain or discuss them. His task is the simpler one of telling what was done by and happened to the Sixth Corps, with especial reference to the part taken by the Vermont troops. To go back a

little, the Sixth Corps left its camp near White Oak Church in the afternoon of the 28th, and bivouacked that night, without fires, about a mile back from the river, the regiments of the Vermont brigade being crowded together in the woods, on ground so low and wet that the soldier thought himself lucky who could lie on a brush-heap instead of in a puddle. In the early morning a force crossed the river in boats and captured the enemy's picket line on the south bank; and pontoon bridges were laid at Franklin's crossing. Brooks's division then crossed the river, and Howe's division moved down near the bridges. These divisions remained thus during Thursday and Friday. A good deal of rain fell, and the mud was deep; but the spirits of the troops and their faith in General Hooker were high. Brooks's skirmishers on Thursday unmasked to some extent the enemy's force, which, under General Early, occupied the heights, with a line along the railroad on the plain in front. Early made a formidable show of strength, and at times moved troops to and fro in masses large enough to give the impression that he was holding the position with a very strong force. There were some artillery duels to the left; but no other fighting. Friday morning, General Hooker's order, announcing that he had gained the enemy's rear and that Lee must fly or come out and give battle where certain destruction awaited him, was published to the troops. The day passed quietly in front of Fredericksburg; but the sound of artillery came in the afternoon from the west, where the columns which Hooker had pushed out, only to withdraw them, were meeting some resistance. Friday night was quiet and even delightful along the Rappahannock. The moon was nearly full and its light glistened broad and bright on the river, the intervals between the river and the hills was spangled with the lights of the Union army, while the Confederate camp fires gleamed and their signal lights flashed along the semicircle of the heights.

Saturday morning, the First corps was withdrawn from its position on the left of the Sixth and sent around to strengthen Hooker at Chancellorsville, though it was not used after it got there. There were some exchanges of compliments between Sedgwick's batteries and skirmishers and the enemy's this day; but neither side took the offensive in earnest. The heavy firing and clouds of rising smoke beyond Fredericksburg to the west, however, told of serious work in progress there, and the occasional visible hurrying of troops in that direction from the enemy's lines in front indicated that his left was being reinforced from his right. Brooks advanced to the stage road, Saturday, pushing the enemy back to the woods; in the evening Howe's division crossed the river, and the Sixth Corps was concentrated on the right bank. The men lay on their arms that night. At eleven o'clock that evening, General Sedgwick received from Hooker orders, sent after the disaster to his right wing had occurred, to put the Sixth Corps in motion, seize Fredericksburg and the heights, move out toward Chancellorsville, destroying any force that blocked the way, and to get into the vicinity of the main army by daylight.

General Sedgwick was severely blamed by various generals, from General Hooker down to one of his own division commanders,⁶ for not obeying this order with more promptness and energy. Sedgwick's reply to the charge of inaction was that he did all that was practicable; that the order was given upon the assumption that there was a very small rebel force to oppose him, whereas he knew that the heights were defended by a large force; and that the distance between him and Chancellorsville was so great, being fourteen miles, that he could not have reached Hooker by daybreak even if there had not been an armed rebel in the way. It is to be said on Sedgwick's side of the case, that there is no doubt

⁶ General Howe.

that Hooker supposed Sedgwick had less ground to cover, in order to join him, than was the case. He did not seem to realize that Sedgwick was not at or opposite Fredericksburg, but three miles below. Furthermore, General Hooker and those about his headquarters believed that Lee had withdrawn troops from his right till not over a brigade was left to make a show of opposition to Sedgwick; whereas in fact Lee had left an entire division, Early's ,⁷ and two brigades—Barksdale's , of McLaws's division, and Wilcox's of Anderson's division—to guard his lines about Fredericksburg. Early had at his disposal a force of 10,000 men—not much short of the number that had beaten back Burnside's army from those heights—and 50 guns, all so strongly posted that one defender was worth two or three assailants.

Of course General Sedgwick could not forget that the task assigned to him was to carry with his single corps a position from which four months before full half of the army of the Potomac had been beaten back with terrible loss. He cannot be blamed for acting with considerable caution under all the circumstances. And yet, with all allowances, it must be admitted that it was a great pity that he should not have pushed his columns along somewhat more vigorously that night, carried the heights at an earlier hour next morning, and hurried out toward Chancellorsville in the forenoon. The two or three hours thus gained, might, and probably would, have made all the difference in the result of the battle of Chancellorsville. But even this mild suggestion seems hardly generous in view of what was actually accomplished by Sedgwick. For it has been truly said that his "brilliant exploit in carrying the Fredericksburg Heights, and his subsequent fortitude in a trying situation, shine out as the one relieving brightness amid the gloom of that hapless battle."⁸

⁷ The Confederate divisions comprised from four to six brigades, and comprised of nearly double the numbers of the Union divisions.

⁸ William Swinton.

THE STORMING OF MARYE'S HEIGHTS.

On receiving the order above mentioned, an hour before midnight, Sedgwick put his corps in motion for Fredericksburg. The head of Newton's division, which was in advance, was harassed and delayed by the enemy's skirmishers, all the way, and it was daylight before Howe's division, which came next, filed into the Bowling Green road. Howe advanced to Hazel Run, on the south of Fredericksburg and took position facing Marye's Hill. Here he lay for four or five hours, while other troops were getting into position, and while the enemy's lines were felt by Gibbon, whose division occupied the town, and by Brooks, whose division was on the left, along Deep Run. Sedgwick decided on a general assault on the works square in his front, to be made by Newton's and Howe's divisions. Howe got his order at eleven o'clock in the forenoon, and at once formed three storming columns, two of which, it will be noticed, were commanded by Vermonters, and were composed in part of Vermont regiments.

Before describing their brilliant and successful assault, some additional description of the ground may be of service. The plain of Fredericksburg, as the reader already knows, is encircled by a rim of highlands, rising in terraces to an elevated plain back of the city. On the edge of this table ground, where it is nearest to the city, is the famous Marye house and hill. Below this was a stone wall, built to face and support a terrace, and forming a parapet along its front. An extension of Marye's Hill to the south is known as "Cemetery Hill." South of this and about half a mile from Marye's, a higher eminence, called "Lee's Hill" after General Lee occupied it as his headquarters at the First Fredericksburg, pushes out its bluffs to the plain; and between these runs the valley and stream of Hazel Run, breaking from the plain above and running easterly to the river. The heights of Lee's Hill stretch southward a mile and a half, to the valley of

Deep Run. In front of these the track of the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac railroad, and the highway (variously called the Old Richmond Stage road, the Bowling Green road and the Port Royal road,) divide the plain by nearly parallel lines. The heights were crowned at every commanding point with earthworks and batteries. Confederate infantry lined the stone wall, and other lines of infantry lay in rifle pits at the foot of the heights. The enemy's skirmishers occupied the railroad track.

Howe formed his troops along the Stage road for the assault, the storming columns being composed as follows: first column, General T. H. Neill commanding, Seventh Maine, Seventy-seventh New York, Thirty-third New York, and half of the Twenty-first New Jersey; second column, Colonel L. A. Grant commanding, Second Vermont, Sixth Vermont, and Twenty-sixth New Jersey; third column, Colonel T. O. Seaver commanding, Third Vermont, Fourth Vermont, and the other half of the Twenty-first New Jersey. Two columns of attack were formed at the same time from Newton's division, in the streets of Fredericksburg. These were to assault the works on the right of Hazel Run, while Howe's columns were to attack on the left of the run.

A more or less continuous artillery fire had been kept up on the enemy's position during the forenoon, by batteries of rifled guns on the north bank, and by some of Sedgwick's light batteries along his line. This lulled for a time, but opened again about noon, with redoubled energy, in preparation for the assault. At this signal the storming columns started together. The order was to move at double quick across the plain, push straight up the heights, and carry the works at the point of the bayonet. This involved an advance over three quarters of a mile of perfectly open ground, commanded at every point by the enemy's batteries; the driving of the enemy's infantry from their breastworks at the base of the hills; the ascent of heights too steep for a horse to

climb;⁹ and the storming of a double line of redoubts and breastworks at the top;—nor would the work be ended when these were carried, for the batteries on Lee's Hill commanded the position of Marye's Hill. The time for preparation was short; knapsacks were quickly unslung and piled by the road, and in five minutes the lines were in order for the advance. In five minutes more they swept out across the plain in splendid style, forming a spectacle which none who witnessed it on either side ever forgot. Each pushed rapidly forward, without firing a shot. Early's batteries opened on them fiercely, and with some effect; but they moved too quickly to be kept in range and suffered less than might have been expected. The two storming parties of Newton's division, having less distance to go, first reached the opposing works, drove two regiments of Barksdale's brigade¹⁰ from their lower line pressed on to the crest, and carried the works to the right of Marye's. They lost both their commanders¹¹ and a good many men; but took all the guns in the works in their front, and many prisoners.

Neill's and Grant's columns moved on the left of Hazel Run, driving the enemy from the railroad cut and rifle pits beyond; then bearing to the right crossed the ravine of Hazel Run, waded the stream, there two or three feet deep, and moved up the southern slope of Cemetery Hill, to the left of the stone wall. In the latter part of the charge, the front lines became somewhat divided and mixed, owing to the circumstances that the New Jersey regiments in each line held back, while the two Vermont regiments, the Second

⁹ The commanders of the columns of Howe's division and the regimental field officers of the Vermont regiments all left their horses, and went forward on foot, in the belief that horses could not climb where they were going.

¹⁰ The Eighteenth and Twenty-first Mississippi.

¹¹ Colonel Spear of the Sixty-first Pennsylvania, killed, and Colonel Johns of the Seventh Massachusetts, severely wounded.

and Sixth, pushed on. The skirmishers (of the Seventy-seventh New York) the Thirty-third New York, and the Sixth Vermont which passed two regiments whose place was in front of it, entered the first line of works on the Heights about together, the enemy falling back before them to their second line.

Marye's Hill, in front of which a few months before Hancock, French and Howard lost 4,000 men without fairly reaching the stone wall, was thus carried; but the assailants did not rest there, for the Confederate guns on Lee's Hill to the left, and on the second crest in front which Wilcox had just occupied with his brigade and Lewis's battery, were throwing shell and grape; and there was plainly work still to be done. The Sixth Vermont was accordingly deployed as skirmishers, by order of General Newton, and sent forward for the guns in front, which were about 600 yards away. In this the Second was efficiently aided by Martin's battery.¹² Martin had closely followed the infantry lines, and ascending by the road to the crest, went at once into battery near Marye's house, and began to make it warm for Wilcox, at the same time that his right was attacked by the Second Vermont. This had started across the plain below with the Twenty-sixth New Jersey on its left. Coming under an enfilading fire from the batteries on Lee's Hill, as well as from the front, the New Jersey regiment first crowded to the right, its line lapping that of the Second, and then halted near the foot of the slope and opened a scattering and harmless fire upon the works and batteries above. Marching the Second Vermont to the right a short distance by the flank, to disentangle its line, Colonel Grant faced it to the front and led it forward alone. The regiment was halted for five minutes, to take breath, under the cover of the bank, which was steep enough to afford protection from the showers

¹² Battery F., Fifth U. S. Artillery.

of grape and canister, and then pushed forward up the hill, till it gained a line of rifle pits on the first crest, which, with a brass field piece, had just been abandoned by the enemy.¹³ The regiment here halted and dressed its lines for the charge on the second crest. Colonel Grant had meantime discovered the Third-third New York back near the Run, and having ordered it up within supporting distance, the Second again started forward, with two companies in front as skirmishers. The enemy at this time showed no intention of leaving the second crest; but on the contrary opened a hot fire, from which the Second suffered severely. Finding that his men were dropping rapidly, and perceiving that the works in front were strongly manned, Colonel Walbridge halted his regiment, which vigorously returned the enemy's fire, till the Thirty-third New York and Seventh Maine came up on its right and left, when the line again advanced. Under the combined assault, Wilcox, who had his entire brigade there, with such of Barksdale's troops as had escaped from Marye's Hill, gave way. The Union standards were planted in the Confederate works, and Early's position on the right of Hazel Run was fully carried.

While these events were in progress, Seaver's column had made an equally gallant advance across the plain, and bearing to the left assaulted the works on Lee's Hill, which were held by three Mississippi regiments of Barksdale's brigade,¹⁴ and a regiment of Hays's brigade, with Frazer's and

¹³ An officer of the Twenty-sixth New Jersey thus describes this movement: "As we approached the foot of the hills, we could see the rebel gunners limbering up their pieces. The Second Vermont, which had got a little ahead of us, were now moving up the steep slope on our right, in beautiful line; and presently we also commenced the ascent. A terrible volley thinned the ranks of the Vermonters; but they pressed on, and the enemy began to give away. As we reached the top of the hill we could see the flying foe, crossing through a gully and ascending the rise of ground opposite. The terrible Fredericksburg Heights had been captured."

¹⁴ Barksdale had divided his brigade, stationing two regiments on Marye's Hill and sending three to Lee's Hill.

Carleton's batteries. The Third Vermont was the first to gain the crest, and at once engaged the enemy. The Fourth and Fifth, came up immediately. The enemy withdrew after a short resistance and the position was carried. All this was accomplished so speedily that Early, who had the bigger part of his division within supporting distance, could not reinforce his lines on the heights in time to save them. He lost eight guns, three on Marye's Hill and the second crest, and five on Lee's Hill. His loss of men was serious, Barksdale alone losing 606 men from his brigade, of whom 327 were reported missing, most of them having been captured on Marye's Hill. Moreover Early was fairly cut off from the rest of Lee's army; and he would have been in serious trouble if Sedgwick's orders had not been peremptory to march toward Chancellorsville.

The reader will understand that it is not claimed that the Sixth Corps carried the heights of Fredericksburg in the face of as many men and guns as those which threw Burnside back from their front. Early was not expecting Sedgwick's attack, and was not fully prepared to meet it. But the heights were carried against heavy opposition. No similar assault on the Southern side during the war equaled this in brilliancy and success; and in these respects it was surpassed, on the Northern side, if at all, only by Lookout Mountain and the final storming of Lee's lines at Petersburg.

The loss of the Sixth Corps, in this brilliant passage of arms, was little greater than that of the enemy—though the latter fought with great advantages of position. The casualties in the Vermont regiments were 132, of which number 105 were in the Second Vermont. Almost all of these occurred in its assault on the second crest. The whole affair did not occupy an hour. The brigade held the captured works, till relieved, an hour later, by Brooks's division. The Vermont regiments then returned to the plain to get their knapsacks and some coffee, but soon hurried back, marching

through the outskirts of Fredericksburg, and went out over the plank road with the rest of Howe's division.

The Sixth Corps was now marching toward Chancellorsville; Brooks had the advance and in his front was Wilcox's Confederate brigade, which had fallen back from the heights as far as Salem Church, four miles from Fredericksburg. General Lee, having received the startling news of the loss of the heights of Fredericksburg, and having struck Hooker a stunning blow in the forenoon, at once detached McLaws 's division and a brigade of Anderson's division to reinforce Wilcox and ward off the danger to his rear. McLaws joined Wilcox at Salem Church, and Brooks soon not only found his efforts to push forward resisted, but was himself forced back by the constantly increasing numbers in his front. He was having hot work, as Howe's division marched out over the plank road; and a sorry stream of wounded men was passing to the rear.¹⁵

The first hours of daylight next morning disclosed a serious condition of affairs. Early, having discovered that Sedgwick's movement had left the heights of Fredericksburg substantially undefended, at daylight re-occupied the line along the heights, from which he had been driven the day before. Sedgwick was thus cut off from Fredericksburg, and to the dangers on his front and left was added a new peril in his rear. General Lee had, in fact, decided to make an end of Sedgwick, before giving any more attention to Hooker. He went to superintend the affair in person, taking with him Anderson's division, and not doubting that with three divisions, outnumbering the Sixth Corps by four or five thousand men, he could drive it into the river. Sedgwick, on his part, supposed that he was even more heavily outnumbered; but

¹⁵ Among them, many Vermonters noticed, in an ambulance, Captain Theodore Read, of General Brooks's staff, formerly the assistant adjutant general of the Vermont brigade.

he prepared to make the stoutest resistance possible. Howe's division was faced about to the rear, that is to the east, to receive Early. Brooks's division was placed at right angles with Howe, facing south, and confronting Anderson. Newton, facing west and with his right on the river at Banks's Ford was opposed to McLaws. In other words the lines of the Sixth Corps formed three sides of a hollow square, enveloped by the enemy.

Howe, with but two brigades, numbering all told less than 6,000 men, had a line of two miles long to hold, extending from the turnpike or plank road,¹⁶ on which they had marched out from Fredericksburg, nearly to the river. The Vermont brigade held the right of the line, its own right resting on the road and connecting at an angle with the left of Brooks's division.

Lee spent most of the day in getting his troops into position, reconnoitring, and feeling of his enemy, in one of which operations Early felt a point on Howe's line, and lost 200 men and a battle flag, of the Fifty-eight Virginia. He finally decided to make his main attack on the right and centre of Howe's line, intending to break through, taking Sedgwick's lines in reverse on right and left, and cut off and capture as much of the Sixth Corps as he did not destroy. His preparations were not completed till five o'clock in the afternoon. A few minutes after that hour the right and centre of Howe's line were attacked, "with a violence," says that general, "that I had never before encountered." Early's assault was made by the brigades of Hays, Hoke and Gordon, moving *en echelon*. In preparation for it Howe had formed his division in a double line. The front line consisted of Neill's brigade and the Fifth Vermont, with a line of skirmishers in front, consisting in part of two com-

¹⁶ This plank road became a common turnpike two or three miles out from the city.

panies of the Fifth under Major Dudley. The other regiments of the Vermont brigade and a battery formed the second line, arranged as follows from right to left: Third Vermont, Rigby's battery, Sixth Vermont, Second Vermont, Twenty-sixth New Jersey, and Fourth Vermont. The last named regiment was posted well to the front in the edge of a piece of pine woods, with a ravine and open field in front of it. The line of the other regiments extended along a slight swell of ground, the crest of which afforded partial protection to the guns, and to the infantry when lying down. In this order Early's assault was awaited. As it developed, battery after battery came into position on the crests in front of Howe, and the shells began to whiz and crack along his lines. Heavy masses of Confederate infantry next appeared, moving down the slopes in successive lines. Their onset grazed Brooks's skirmish line, and then fell heavily on Howe's right and centre. Dudley's skirmishers received the advance, falling back inch by inch, and resisting the enemy's skirmishers till his front line of battle came up. As this crossed a swell in front of the Fifth Vermont, it bore to its own right to strike Neill's front. Seizing the opportunity thus offered, Lieut. Colonel Lewis at once swung forward the right of his regiment and poured into the gray ranks sweeping past his front a terrible enfilading fire, which, in the opinion of Colonel Grant, disabled a much greater number of the enemy than there were men in the regiment. The Fifth kept this up till the second Confederate line came up. As this extended beyond his right, to prevent it from enfilading him and reaching his rear, Colonel Lewis now drew off his regiment by the flank, through a depression of the ground behind him, and passing in the rear of the Third, took position in the second line.

Neill's line to the left had in the meantime been assailed with great fury, and begun to give way after heavy loss.¹⁷ The second line must now receive the stress of the

¹⁷ Neill lost in all, that evening, about 1,000 men.

assault, and on its steadiness depended the maintenance of Howe's position, and the life of the corps. Some fresh dispositions were hastily made by Colonel Grant to meet the emergency. The Twenty-sixth New Jersey was moved to the right and a little forward, to present a front from that quarter, and to leave the veteran regiments of the brigade together where the brunt of the rebel assault was likely to fall. The Second Vermont was moved to the left into the place vacated by the New Jersey regiment, and the Third Vermont took the place of the Second, leaving the Sixth on the extreme right of the brigade line. Flushed with their success thus far and sweeping before them a portion of Neill's brigade like froth on the crest of the wave, with the "rebel yell" rising shrill above the din of the strife, the Confederate lines now came in on the charge. The New Jersey regiment received Hoke with a volley, which staggered but did not stop him, and as he pressed on the Jerseymen broke and fell back in extreme disorder.¹⁸ The surge of attack now struck the Second Vermont with even added impetus; but it had met a different obstacle. The men of the Second, who had been kept down, rose, and opened a fire which from its rapidity and intensity seemed like a continuous volley, and the Confederate line quailed. As soon as the demoralized Jerseymen, passing through to the rear, had got away from its front, the Third Vermont took part in the music, and added a hot fire to that of the Second, under which Hoke's lines halted and broke. Hays's brigade on his right, however, still pressed on, obliquely, till it met the Fourth Vermont, whose position, as has been mentioned, was somewhat in front of the general line of the brigade. Colonel

¹⁸ "We were not the only regiment that was broken on that fearful Monday night; and when veterans were compelled to give way we might be pardoned for doing the same; but many look back on that moment with regret. Reaching a brush fence the Twenty-sixth rallied."—Notes of an officer of the Twenty-sixth New Jersey, quoted in *New Jersey and the Rebellion*.

Stoughton threw back the right wing of his regiment so as to oppose a squarer front to the enemy, and received Hays with a fire which cleared the slope of the ravine in Stoughton's front; and the tide passed along it to his left. To prevent being flanked from that quarter, he again changed front, refusing his left, and held the masses in front of him in check, till the Fifth Vermont arrived from the right and took position on his left. The Fifth here commanded the ravine and the crest on the left of it, and made the left of the brigade line secure for the time. The assault now lulled for a few moments, only to rage with fresh fury. Hoke and Hays rallied their men and renewed the attack with great vigor. They met at every point a wall of fire, and could nowhere break through the line of the Vermont brigade. But on its right a gap in the lines had been opened by the gradual moving of the regiments to the left. Perceiving this, Early now tried to push into this opening and turn the right of the brigade. The Sixth Vermont here held a low crest, behind which they were lying down. Colonel Barney kept his men down, as several Confederate regiments advanced, shouting and shaking their battle flags. They came on at double quick to within twenty feet of the line of the Sixth, when, at the word, the regiment rose, fired a volley full in their faces, then charged in turn and drove them at the point of the bayonet down the slope and to the crest beyond. The Sixth took in this counter charge, a colonel,¹⁹ a lieutenant colonel, a major and 17 other officers, and 237 enlisted men. A portion of the Twenty-sixth New Jersey, who had been rallied by Colonel Martindale, advanced with the Sixth Vermont and took part in this splendid charge.²⁰

¹⁹ Colonel Stafford of the Ninth Louisiana.

²⁰ A member of the New Jersey regiment describes the transaction as follows: "The Sixth Vermont lay behind a little rise of ground, awaiting the onset of the rebel hosts. Although the enemy was at least three times their number, for there was a whole brigade of them, the gallant Vermonters let them come on until they were actually within a few feet of them, and then, rising, poured in a volley which literally decimated the foe. They fled hastily, and the Sixth Corps was saved. It was now our turn and the Vermonters, followed by the Twenty-sixth, pressed forward on the flying foe, until we reached the brow of the hill from which they had come. As we went we took a great many prisoners."

The Confederate lines now fell back from the entire front of the Vermont brigade, leaving the ground strewn with their dead and wounded, while among the prisoners taken by the Vermonters were men of seven Confederate regiments—the Seventh, Eight and Ninth Louisiana, and the Sixth, Twenty-first, Twenty-fourth and Fifty-seventh North Carolina. Early was thus fairly repulsed on the right and centre of Howe's division. But the left of the division, consisting of a portion of Neill's brigade, after contesting its position against heavy odds, had been pushed back far enough to endanger the left of the Vermont brigade, and Colonel Grant had withdrawn the Fourth Vermont a short distance, when a battery and two regiments²¹ sent over from Newton's division by General Sedgwick arrived, and extended Grant's line to the left. The battery rendered good service; and Early's progress was soon checked. General Howe says of this portion of the action: "The enemy, apparently thinking our left was giving way, rallied and "confidently advanced until they brought their flank opposite the woods in which was placed "those sterling soldiers of the Vermont brigade. At the favorable moment this brigade opened fire "on the flank of the enemy's columns, and immediately the batteries in front opened a direct fire. "The effect of this flank and direct fire on the enemy was most marked. In a short time not a "hostile shot came into our lines. Darkness now came on. Soon the moon rose and lighted up the "field; but not a rebel could be seen between our lines and the Heights of Fredericksburg."

²¹ Battery G., Second U. S. Artillery, Lieutenant Butler; Ninety-eighth Pennsylvania and Sixty-second New York.

As General Lee waited till Early should secure a positive advantage before he pushed in at any other point, the other divisions of the Sixth Corps were not assaulted in any force, and the contest of Monday evening was the last serious fighting of the Chancellorsville campaign.

General Sedgwick, having received no help or encouragement to expect help from General Hooker, and believing that he had in his front two-thirds—as he actually had a majority—of Lee's army, decided to fall back that night to Banks's Ford, where a pontoon bridge had been laid, and to cross the river, leaving Howe's division to the last to cover the movement. The division accordingly faced the enemy till half-past ten o'clock, when Howe began to withdraw, his rear being guarded by the Vermont brigade. This held the front till midnight, when it was withdrawn. The order to retire was received with some astonishment by the men, as they had fully repulsed the enemy and knew of no reason why they should leave the field. But it was of course obeyed. The brigade fell back slowly over the two miles of ground between it and Banks's Ford, halting frequently, and finally forming a new line of battle, in the small hours, to guard the bridge head while the rest of the corps was crossing. A strong skirmish line, supported by the Second, Third and Sixth Vermont regiments, under the command of Colonel T. O. Seaver, acting division officer of the day, screened the movement. The skirmishers repulsed a slight attack and held their ground till the corps had crossed the bridge, which a Confederate battery up the river was now shelling. About three o'clock in the morning the three regiments withdrew across the river, and lastly the skirmishers were safely brought off by Major Dudley, reaching the river just before daylight, in a dense fog, to find the bridge on which they had expected to cross, cut loose from the southern bank and swinging down stream. All, however, save a few severely wounded men who had been left in a barn

half a mile back, made out to get across, some in pontoon boats, and some by a bridge lower down the stream; and as the daylight crept over the eastern hills the last of the brigade marched wearily up the heights on the northern shore. They dropped as soon as they were halted and slept till noon, their rest hardly broken even by the shells from the enemy's batteries across the river, which fell along the lines of sleeping soldiers.

The next night Hooker, against the wish and advice of some of his best generals, returned to his former camp on the north side of the Rappahannock. The campaign cost him his reputation as commander-in-chief; and Lee the life of his best lieutenant, Stonewall Jackson.²²

As for the Army of the Potomac, none of its members except those of the Eleventh corps, felt any of the disgrace of defeat. They knew that the army had been beaten only by its own commander or by the lack of a commander. In the Sixth Corps, and especially in Howe's division and in the Vermont brigade, the feeling of the troops approached exultation. Of the thirteen guns lost by the Army of the Potomac not one belonged to the Sixth Corps; while Sedgwick was able to say in his report, that his corps "captured 15 pieces of artillery, nine of which were brought off, five battle flags, and 1,400 prisoners, including many officers of rank;" and that "no material of any kind belonging to the corps fell into the hands of the enemy, except several wagons and a forge, that were passing through Fredericksburg at the time

²² The following grim interchange of wit between Union and Confederate pickets took place shortly after Hooker's failure and Stoneman's cavalry raid:

Rebel picket—Where's Hooker gone?

Union picket—Gone to attend Stonewall Jackson's funeral.

Rebel—Say, has the Eleventh corps stopped running yet?

Union—Oh, yes, they stopped soon after taking down your Stone wall. By the way don't you want our Stone-man to set him up again?

Rebel—No, Jackson don't need any Yankee raid-iating, where he's gone.

of its re-occupation by the enemy." General Howe and the men under him could claim that the Second division stormed five of the works on Marye's Heights, assisted in carrying Cemetery Hill, took six of the eight guns captured on the heights, all of which were brought off; and did substantially all the fighting of May 4th, "without losing a gun or a prisoner to the enemy."²³ The rest of the army appreciated these facts, and from this time on, the white cross of the division became a badge of high honor, and was worn with especial pride by those who bore it.

Colonel Grant issued an order to his brigade, in which he said: "you stormed and took "the heights of Fredericksburg, which it is believed was one of the most brilliant feats of the war. "You took three pieces of artillery and many prisoners. And although you are not in possession "of those heights, you were not driven from them; but left them to advance on a retreating enemy. "At the battle near Banks's Ford, you sustained the attack of a vastly superior force, no less than "three brigades, and repulsed the enemy with great slaughter, taking many prisoners, among them "several colonels, majors and line officers. Your undaunted courage, unbroken front, steady aim "and brilliant charge, give you title to the highest praise. The thanks of the colonel commanding "are freely given. In you he has the fullest confidence and the greatest pride."

Such praise of the Vermont regiments was not confined to their brigade commander. General Sedgwick said in his report: "It is no disparagement to the other regiments of corps, to say that the steadiness and valor of the Sixth Maine, Fifth Wisconsin, Seventh Massachusetts, and the Vermont brigade, could not be excelled;" and he included Colonel L. A. Grant, among the brigade commanders whom he commended to the special notice of the commanding general for

²³ General Howe's Report.

their "skill and personal gallantry." General Howe said: "I desire especially to mention General Neill and Colonels Grant and Seaver, for the gallant and intrepid manner in which they led the storming columns to the assault [on the heights.] Nothing has been more handsomely or successfully done." He also mentions the "important and efficient" services rendered by Colonel Grant and his brigade in maintaining his line against heavy odds, in the battle of the next day. Colonel Grant, in his report, mentions as deserving the highest praise, Colonels Walbridge, Seaver, Stoughton, Barney and Lewis; and specially commends Colonel Seaver, for his services as division officer of the day; Lieut. Colonel Pingree, commanding the Third, while Colonel Seaver was so detached; Major C. P. Dudley of the Fifth Vermont for services in bringing off the skirmish line at the Ford; Acting Quartermaster A. Austin; and Captain A. Brown, and Lieutenants Forbes, Bain, Butterfield and French of his staff. Of the line officers and rank and file he says: "Too much praise cannot be awarded to the officers and men for their steady, brave and gallant conduct. The men did their duty, and the officers were there to direct and encourage. With the exception of the Twenty-sixth New Jersey,²⁴ not an officer failed to come to time; not a man straggled from the ranks. When a regiment moved it did it almost with the precision of ordinary drill. All did their best. None left their ranks to dash forward, none to fall to the rear. They could not have done better." This was high praise. Beyond doubt the part taken by the Vermont brigade in this campaign and battle did more to establish its reputation as a fighting brigade, than any previous passage of its history.

²⁴ Colonel Grant adds later, that the Twenty-sixth New Jersey, "redeemed itself and left the contest a victorious and compact regiment."

The losses of the Vermont regiments were as follows:

	Killed.	Wounded.	Died of wounds.
May 3d			
Second Vermont Regiment,	11	94	7
Third	1	6	0
Fourth	0	1	0
Sixth,	<u>1</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>0</u>
Total,	13	109	7
May 4th			
Second Vermont Regiment	6	20	4
Third,	2	24	1
Fourth,	1	22	0
Fifth,	3	11	1
Sixth,	4	46	6
Total	16	123	12

The aggregate of the losses of the two days was 29 killed and 232 wounded, of whom 19 died of their wounds. A few were reported missing at the time, but as usual they came in later, or were accounted for among the killed and wounded. Captain Luther Ainsworth of the Sixth was among the killed, and 11 line officers were wounded, one of them, Lieutenant Gleason of the Second, mortally.

What proportion of the loss inflicted on the enemy may be credited to the Vermont brigade, cannot of course be accurately determined. Early reported his loss at 136 killed, 838 wounded, and "some 500" missing—these figures not including the loss in Barksdale's brigade or in the artillery. The missing must have been more numerous than he states by several hundred; for of the 1,400 prisoners captured by the Sixth Corps, almost all were from Early's command. Adding Barksdale's loss of 600, Early's loss could not have been less than 2500, killed, wounded and captured; and of this number a very large proportion were killed, wounded and taken by the Vermonters. Colonel Grant estimated the prisoners taken by the Vermont brigade in the repulse of Early at "at least 1,500;" but owing to the withdrawal of the brigade, and the darkness which prevailed at the close

of the engagement only about 400 were actually brought in. "Many prisoners," says Colonel Grant, "were sent to the rear as fast as captured, sometimes with one man as guard, and sometimes with none; and after dark they managed to remain behind, when our line was shortened." Among the Confederate officers who fell in front of the position of the Vermont brigade was Brig. General Hoke, who received a "painful" wound. Colonel Grant's estimate that his brigade inflicted five times the loss it suffered was probably within bounds.

In the afternoon of May 5th, the Sixth Corps moved three or four miles toward Falmouth, and lay there two days while the army marched by on its return to its old lines. On the 8th the corps marched back to White Oak Church and went into camp, the Vermont brigade camping about a mile back of its former camp, near Belle Plain. The Sixth Corps was now on the left of the army, and the Vermont brigade on the left of the corps. Here a month was spent, while Lee was preparing for his second invasion of the North; and Hooker, his army reduced to 80,000 men by the expiration of the terms of nine months troops and the losses of the last campaign, was waiting he knew not for what. It was a pleasant month for the troops. The forests assumed their summer dress. The weather was delightful. The camps were shaded with pines, and rustic halls with vestibules and arches and alcoves of evergreen, rose at the headquarters of the generals. Many ladies, wives and relatives of officers, visited the camps. There were balls, and "sounds of revelry by night," in these rustic palaces. The Vermonters rebuilt their brigade bakery; rations were good and ample; the health of the regiments was excellent; and the men made themselves comfortable for the day and the hour, with the soldier's lack of care for the morrow.