

Charleston Mercury
July 29, 1861
2d + 8th S.C.

From the files of
John Hennessy

BATTLE FIELD OF BULL RUN, July 22.

The Approach of the Enemy—The Battle in the Distance—Ordered Into Action—Discouraging Accounts of our Wounded—Kershaw's Charge up the Hill—Kemper's Alexandria Battery—The Eighth Palmetto Regiment to the Rescue—The Rout—Kemper's Escape—Trophies, etc., etc.

After the repulse of the 18th inst., the enemy withdrew towards Centreville, and, except in burying the dead, appeared to be inactive during the 19th and 20th, until about midnight. At that hour, the rumbling of artillery over the stony roads, the barking of dogs, etc., told that vast preparations for the attack of the morrow were going forward. To the ears of the Kershaw's Detachment, who were thrown out half a mile to the left, and in advance of our centre, Mitchell's Ford, those sounds were quite distinct. At 5½ o'clock a. m., a cannonading, on the right, begun, apparently from the point of attack of the 18th inst. A few minutes later, the firing of heavy guns was heard on the left, also, in the direction of the Stone Bridge. The calibre of the pieces was, evidently, from the sound, greater than that of those used on the 18th, and together with the peculiar whirr of the shells, and stunning detonation of the mortars, gave ample proof that the Northern generals were determined to use every effort to annihilate us that day, the memorable 21st, as they had promised to do on the first fair occasion. Gradually the cannonading on the left increased, whilst that on the right grew less. The post of the picket guard of the 2d Palmetto Regiment was upon a hill overlooking all the country to the north and westward. And from this point, curling up over the tree tops, which hid the battle field, could be seen the smoke, but nothing more. About 10 o'clock there rose a great shout, and a rumor soon came down to us that our boys were driving back the enemy. This seemed to be confirmed by the smoke, which receded to the northwest. The Confederate cavalry, too, were seen galloping in that direction, perhaps to cut up the flying columns of the Yankees. More than an hour passed on, and nothing of the strife is heard, but the roar of ordnance and the rattle of musketry.

Suddenly an order comes, borne, I believe, by Gen. MCGOWAN, for the 2d and 8th Palmetto Regiments to hasten to the assistance of the left wing. Couriers are dispatched to Capt. PERRYMAN, out scouting, and Capt. RHETT, on picket guard, to march across the fields to the left, and join their Regiment, the 2d, which is on the march to aid the left wing. This Regiment, to which was attached KEMPER'S Battery, followed by the 8th, Col. CASH, hurried to the scene of action. It was met along the way by numbers of the wounded, dying and retiring, who declared that the day had gone against us; that SLOAN'S Regiment, the 4th, was cut to pieces; that HAMPTON'S Legion, coming to the rescue, and the Louisiana Battalion, were annihilated; that Gen. BEB and Col. HAMPTON were mortally wounded, and Col. BEN. JOHNSON killed, and that the Confederate forces were out-flanked and routed, and the day lost. This was the unvarying tenor of the words that greeted us from the wounded and dying and the fugitives who met us during the last mile of our approach to the field of battle. To the sharp cry of the officers of the 2d Regiment, "On, men on! these fellows are whipped, and think that every body else is," the troops responded nobly, and closing up their columns, marched rapidly and boldly forward.

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The fast flying cannon shot now cut down several of our number before we got sight of the foe. Presently they became visible, with banners insolently flaunting, and driving before them the remains of our shattered forces. But the 2d, undaunted by the sight, ployed column, and, with a shout, charged up the hill at the double quick. The Yankees could not stand the shock, and fell back into a wood on the west of the hill, pouring into us a galling fire. Driven through this wood, they again formed on a brigade of their men in a field beyond, and for half an hour a severe struggle took place between this regiment, with KEMPER'S Battery attached, unsupported, and an immense force of United States troops. We poured in a steady and deadly fire upon their ranks. While the battle raged, the 8th South Carolina Regiment came up, and Col. CASH, pointing to the enemy, says "Col. KERSHAW, are those the d—d scoundrels that you wish driven off the field? I'll do it in five minutes, by God!" "Yes, Colonel," says KERSHAW, "form on our left, and do it if you can." In a few moments the 8th got close up on the left, and poured in a murderous fire, under which the enemy reeled and broke.

Again they formed on a hill, and new legions covering the hills around rushed to their support, but the terrific fire of KEMPER'S Battery was too much for them. They reeled again and broke. "Forward, Second Palmetto Regiment!" says KERSHAW. "Now is the time!" The Second and Eighth now dashed forward, fast but steadily, and the victory was won. Throwing down their arms and abandoning their cannon, the United States troops fled precipitately. The Second and Eighth pursued them to the Stone Bridge, about a mile, and there for the first time KERSHAW received an order, since leaving the entrenchments. He had retrieved the lost battle and gained the victory of "Stone Bridge" with two regiments and a battery of four pieces.

Now we halted under an order from General

HAUBREGARD, not to engage the enemy, should he form again, without reinforcements. Such as could be had were now hurried up. He inspected the division, thus increased, consisting of the 2d and 8th South Carolina Regiments, the shattered remnants of HAMPTON'S Legion, about 150 strong, whom we had rescued (what with the killed, wounded, and those attending them, few were left in the field), and one company—partly of Marylanders, and partly of Crescent Blines of New Orleans. KEMPER'S Battery had not been able to keep up with us in the flight of the enemy and our rapid pursuit, for want of horses. Ten minutes we halted, until joined by another small regiment—PRESTON'S Virginians, I believe—then moved on in the chase. Two miles further on, the cavalry joined us; but, finding the enemy posted on a hill, with artillery covering the road, we threw out skirmishers, and formed in line of battle. But the Yankees, after firing a few cannon shot and Minnie balls, again fell back. On we went, and KEMPER having now overtaken us, we deployed, and allowed him to unlimber and give them two or three good rounds, which completely routed the Yankee column again. Their artillery, which was in rear, now plunged wildly forward upon the wagon train, overturning and jamming them in mad disorder. *Sauve qui peut.* Devil take the hindmost, became the order of the day, and the setting sun saw the grand army of the North flying for dear life upon wagon and artillery horses cut loose. They left in our hands thirty odd pieces of cannon, many wagons, an immense number of small arms, and plunder of every kind and description. To-day we can hardly recognize the members of our own company, by reason of their changed exterior. New habiliments and accoutrements abound. Truly, these fellows are well provided.

Thus you see that, on the right wing of the enemy, their chief force, the 2d and 8th South Carolina Regiments, assisted by KEMPER'S Battery, maintained the day, and upheld the ancient honor of the State. As JEFF. DAVIS, at a late hour yesterday, said, in urging forward the Mississippi and Louisiana Regiments, "The 2d and 8th South Carolina Regiments have saved the day, and are now gaining a glorious victory."

During the action, the lion hearted KERSHAW received no orders, and saw none of our Generals, but fought it out on his own plan—driving the enemy in immense numbers before him. Too much honor cannot be given to Capt. KEMPER. His coolness and presence of mind was unshaken at any moment, and his rapidity and accuracy of fire was astonishing. At one time surrounded and taken prisoner, he owed his escape to his cleverness. As soon as he found resistance useless, he cast his eyes round, and, seeing a regiment of Virginians near, said, pointing to them, "Take me to your Colonel." His captors instantly did as he suggested, and actually carried him into the midst of the Virginians before they saw their mistake. In a few moments he was rid of them, and again at the head of his battery, hurling destruction into the ranks of the foe. KERSHAW and KEMPER both deserve to be made Brigadier-Generals, as this great victory is undoubtedly due to their commands.

HAMPTON'S Legion and SLOAN'S Regiment displayed the utmost gallantry, but, in the face of superior artillery and great odds, were not sufficiently sustained.

We hear that our troops succeeded in capturing cannon from the enemy's left wing, also, to the amount of ten or twelve pieces. If that be so, we have captured forty odd pieces, amongst which is SHERMAN'S celebrated battery.

The Palmetto Guard have taken a flag and one or two drums. The The Brooks Guards have captured a flag staff and two kettle drums. The other companies have various articles.

I have written the above in great haste, but the facts are correctly stated. I will give you some other incidents at another time.