

We have met the enemy and gained a tremendous and a glorious victory. South Carolinians have the most important part in the fight and ours (Colonel KERSHAW'S Regiment, Colonel CASH'S Regiment, and KEMPER'S Artillery), have the honor of having turned the issue of the fight and first sent the enemy flying before us. There force is not known, but almost their whole army must have been engaged in the fight: ours amounted to about 15,000. On account of the inequality of forces, those first engaged on our side suffered very severely. HAMPTON'S Legion was almost cut to pieces. HAMPTON is wounded, and poor Colonel JOHNSON was shot dead while leading the Legion to the charge. His death has caused universal sorrow and grief through all the army, for he proved himself a gallant and excellent officer in the short time that life was spared to him on the field. He was killed at the commencement of the battle, by a rifle ball passing entirely through his head. I have not been able to see after him at all, but HENRY saw his body taken from the field and attended to in the Hospital.

Col. BARTOW, of Savannah, was killed, and has been sent home. The Savannah companies suffered terribly. The Washington Light Infantry went into the fight 110 strong, and joined us, when we advanced, with but 14—they having been separated from the Legion. All of the missing are not, of course, dead or wounded, but I am afraid many are. None of the officers were injured. SLOAN'S South Carolina Regiment was severely injured, but I know no particulars about it. And now for the fight, and their defeat and loss.

Early yesterday morning (Sunday, 21st), a heavy cannonading was commenced simultaneously upon the centre and left of our line of defence—we being stationed near the centre, a little to the left. This continued for about an hour, when a heavy discharge of musketry commenced on the left, about three miles from us, which actually raged for about three hours. At the end of this time our regiment was ordered to proceed to the scene of action. We immediately advanced, with KEMPER'S (Alexandria) Artillery, which is attached to our regiment and CASH'S regiment. After marching for about four miles, we formed in line of battle in the rear of the field of battle, with rifled shells bursting over and around us every minute. The scene at this time was calculated to appal the oldest veteran, and we were untried and inexperienced volunteers. The dead and wounded were carried by us to the rear in a continuous stream, and squads of the Confederate men were retreating from every portion of the field. The fire in our front kept steadily closing in towards us. We were told that the day was lost; that the South Carolina troops were cut to pieces and ginned out, and the enemy were advancing in vast columns. Yet we firmly advanced through the woods, and soon became engaged in a fierce fight with the New York Fire Zouaves, who stood their ground for a short time, but broke finally and retreated across an open field. We followed them up, and the prospect before us when we reached the open field was indeed hopeless. Not a friend could be seen, and the enemy was drawn up in line after line for a mile in front of us. We kept advancing, pouring in volley after volley upon those nearest us. KEMPER'S battery was delayed for half an hour, but finally came up with us and sent in round after round of shell and grape. Col. CASH, at the same time, advanced on our left, and several other regiments on his left. The defeat commenced by us was followed up by them, and soon the Yankees were flying from all parts of the field. Although but a small force, compared with theirs, we followed them up—our Regiment (Kershaw's) in the advance. Their retreat soon became a perfect rout. Infantry, cavalry and artillery joined in the pursuit of the perfect cloud of dust before them. The scene along the road was awful. The dying and dead scattered in every direction. Cannon, baggage wagons, arms, accoutrements of every kind and equipments of every description, were lying in the road and through the woods. We kept on in the pursuit for three miles, until all that we could find of the enemy were completely routed, when, by order of BEAUBOARD, we returned to the battle field, where we are now. We took thirty pieces of splendid artillery—some say forty. The small arms can't, as yet, be counted—they say we have captured about ten thousand. Blankets, oil cloths, knapsacks, haversacks, &c., I assure you, literally cover the ground. Where the enemy now are, we don't know. If our whole force is to pursue them, it will be done immediately, as DAVIS is here—he, BEAUBOARD and JOHNSTON having all been in the field yesterday. About their killed and wounded we can tell nothing: they are scattered everywhere. The cavalry who have begun to show themselves are continually bringing prisoners in. McDowell is reported to be wounded. CORCORAN and MCGARRER are killed, they say. The fight for hours was terrible, but the rout was still more so.

I do not know what the loss in our regiment is, but it is very small. In my company only four or five are wounded; none known to be killed as yet. We have gained a victory which will no doubt considerably improve us in the eyes of the world. Our regiment has had a hard time, not having slept under cover for five nights, and rained all the time.

Charleston Mercury

August 1, 1861

2d S.C. (2 letters)

[From another Member of the Palmetto Guard.]
CULPEPER C. H., July 23.

Dear Sister: I suppose you have heard of our retreat from Fairfax C. H. by this time. I will try and give you a description of our retreat and the two battles we have fought lately. Soon Wednesday morning we heard our picket firing, and knew the enemy was approaching. We prepared to meet them, struck our tents, gathered up everything we had, and marched towards our batteries, and sent two companies out as skirmishers. Our company was among the skirmishing party. We had not been out long before the order was given us to retreat. The enemy were in bodies too large for us to contend with. Our object was to draw them on to Manassas Junction or Bull Run, where we had large forces. The retreat was a terrible one: the enemy having the largest force, was trying to cut us off from our batteries. But we were too smart for them. We made a very fast retreat, and the distance being four or five miles, and the enemy not being able to follow us, we were safe. I was one of the company that were sent to the rear. We were ordered to drop our arms in the road. We were ordered to go back to the grave. We cut a hole in the ground for our parents. We continued our march to Bull Run, the enemy pursuing us. At Bull Run, we manned our batteries, and awaited the enemy. They did not come until Thursday morning. The first intimation we had was from our scouts. Two cannon were immediately sent out to guard the road and to decoy them on to our battery. Our Company was sent out with them, to protect and cover the retreat, if necessary. We had not long to wait. We could not see the enemy, but the cannon balls came whistling over our heads like hail. Our cannon fired eight shots, and returned to our battery, our company remaining on the field until they were safe, covering their retreat. The enemy did not come within rifle shot of us, so we did not get a chance to fire. When we found they would not, we retreated to our batteries with their cannon balls pelting after us. The enemy then retired to our right flank, trying to turn it. But they met men there ready to conquer or die. There was a terrible fight going on that side all the morning. We could hear the musketry and cannonading all day long. We heard a shout from our men. We had whipped them on that side. They were running, with our men charging at their heels. The fight then stopped on that side for some time. The order then came for the cannon on our side to go out into the field again. This time the Colonel went himself, with our company and four others. We thought we would get a shot now certainly, but we were doomed to disappointment. They came within range of our cannon.

Our cannon made such horrible havoc among them, that they retreated without injuring any of our men. One shot of our cannon made a perfect path through their ranks. We returned to our batteries on our right flank, where they were fighting in the morning. Only 52 of our men killed and wounded, and about 800 of the enemy. The enemy retreated, and kept a day until Sunday. All Saturday night we were throwing up breastworks, and until Sunday morning 9 o'clock. Sunday, the cannon were heard a mile from us. The fight was going on for hours, a mile away from us. The enemy had retreated twice, and were eight miles from us (12 o'clock). Our Regiment was ordered into the field. Our men were all anxious to get into the fight. Col. Kershaw's leg was badly hurt from a kick from a horse, and he was not expected to be there; but, regardless of his leg, when he saw us file out into the field, he mounted his horse and followed. On our way to the battle field, crowds of wounded men passed us—some of them most miserably cut up. As we came in hearing of the musketry, our Colonel leaped a fence on horseback, and took his place at our head. The men all cheered him. We had not far to go. We are on the battle field. The musket and cannon balls whistle through our ranks. The Colonel says, "My boys, remember Butler, Sumter, and your homes!" We charged upon the enemy. They run like sheep before us. I was the first man in the Regiment shot, and was taken off the field. I am now at a hospital at Culpeper C. H., with about 200 wounded and dying men. They are groaning all around me. But every thing is comfortable here. There is plenty to eat, and kind ladies to nurse us. One of them wanted to write this letter for me—said I'd better not write—but I would.

From the files of
John Hennessy