

Charleston Courier
Aug 2, 1861
2d South Carolina

Private Letter.

We have been favored with the following extracts from a letter written by a member of the Palmetto Guard

VIENNA, July 26, 1861.

Dear M— I telegraphed you a few days since that I was quite well, and last night received your answer. The last part of your message I could not exactly make out, but take it that you intended to ask whether any of our company were killed or wounded. I had just written M—, and told her to send you word, but before this reaches you, you will have heard that we escaped without losing any.

W. Elliott was struck by a shell and stunned, blood issuing from his mouth. He is with us now, but is, I think, injured internally. Reeder was shot through the arm; a bad flesh wound. He had another wound, which I think was in the shoulder. J. L. Moses was struck in the collar bone. Walter was shot through the neck, the worst wound of all. Gaider was knocked down by a shell or spent ball, but is now with us. The Captain of the Butler Guards was wounded in the arm; it is thought he will lose it. One of our men, Rice, went off the ground with him, and while doing so was also shot in the arm. Barnwell, a relation of the Captain, who was fighting with us, was wounded slightly in the nose. These are all we had injured.

Otis Prentiss was a prisoner for a time, but escaped. The loss of our Regiment I do not know. Hardy, one of the Colonel's aids, was killed; one of the Butler Guards and one of the Camden Volunteers were killed. De Pass, a brother of Sam, it is said, is mortally wounded, also another member of his company. You will, however, get full accounts from the official reports.

I will now, as well as I can, give you an account of the whole affair.

On the 17th instant, soon after we had taken our morning wash, it was reported that the Yankees were coming in great force. Most of us then went to breakfast and ate a hearty meal. The order was soon afterwards given to strike tents, which was done, but not without a good deal of murmuring, for they had made us throw up embankments, and now for South Carolinians to retreat before Yankees we looked upon as a disgrace.

Every man packed his knapsack and made ready for a long march back to Bull Run. We were then formed in line, the company being over one hundred strong, when the Colonel advanced and addressed us in such language that we thought we had been mistaken and were not to retreat.

We then advanced and deployed as skirmishers. After remaining there some time, we returned to our quarters and marched towards Bacon's Regiment. The enemy's bayonets could now be seen and we were certain of a fight, and of course, of a victory. Most of us unstrapped our knapsacks and placed them in charge of the villagers, though I could have carried mine without inconvenience.

Our going into the batteries was only a sham to make the enemy believe we were going to fight, until the other regiments got out of the village, when we followed them; and that is the last we saw of our knapsacks, or ever will. However, I can get along very well. I have an oil cloth and two blankets, captured from the enemy, to compensate for my loss. The Yankees had 50,000 and we had 5000. Their object was to surround us and cut us to pieces, but they were mistaken, we got out about a quarter of an hour in advance of them. It was a very hot day, and we suffered intensely, one of our men, Brown, from Barnwell, died at Centreville from the effects of the march. We rested at Centreville till 12 o'clock that night, when we took up our line of march for Bull Run, the battle ground. Again did the enemy almost surround us, but we got out as successfully as we did before.

I was at first much opposed to retreating, but now think it was all for the best.

We reached Bull Run about 2 o'clock, and went back to our old company ground, took a short nap and then got ready to meet the enemy; this was on the morning of the 18th. Two of Kemper's cannon were stationed on a hill about five hundred yards in advance of the breast work; they were supported by our company and one other. Soon the enemy began to throw shot and shell at us but without much effect. Kemper's battery fired eight shots at them, and we then retired to our breast works; they still continued to fire upon us but without injury. Soon we heard the report of rifles and musketry on the right, the enemy trying to flank us; he was met, however, by the Virginia and Alabama troops, and repulsed with great loss. Again did a portion of our troops advance with Kemper who fired several more rounds doing— it was said by those who had climbed into the trees— immense damage. We heard but little more of the enemy till Sunday. In the meantime our regiment had been removed to the left of the brigade.

On Sunday morning they again poured in on our batteries, but it was only a feint, as the battle soon afterwards commenced on the left at the Stone Bridge, where Sloan's Regiment was, together with Hampton's Legion and troops from other States. After they had been fighting about an hour, orders came for our Regiment, together with Col. Cash's, to proceed to the field. Off we started in high spirits, and on our way met numbers of the wounded coming from the field. They all told us the day was lost, that the enemy was cutting us to pieces.

Never did men go into battle under more unfavorable circumstances, but they did not appear to mind it much. We were also told that friends were firing upon each other as it was impossible to distinguish friend from foe. We formed line of battle, by coming into line by "on right by file into line," it was done under a galling fire. We then fixed bayonets and charged into a thick wood which we found filled with the enemy.

It was while forming that Elliott, Reeder and Moses were wounded, and our flag was struck twice. We charged out of the wood with a yell when the enemy broke and ran. We poured into them a terrific fire, and could have killed many more, when the cry of "Friends!" was raised, at which we ceased until the Stars and Stripes came into view, when we plucked into them right and left. The artillery came up, and the rout became general, and such a rout you never saw. They lost about fifty pieces of artillery, and baggage wagons innumerable. Of this you will see an account in the papers. If I live to see you again I will tell you more about the battle; it was the greatest defeat the world has ever heard of, and it is said that to Kershaw's and Cash's Regiments, together with Kemper's Artillery, which is attached to our regiment, is due the credit of the victory.

From the files of
John Hennessy