

July 31, 1861

2^d Connecticut

From the 24 Regiment.

Camp Kears, Washington City,
July 28, 1861

Messrs. Editors.—It is Sabbath morning, just one week since the memorable conflict at Bull's Run, and oh! how different this moment are the feelings, the anxieties, the doubts and fears of the future. Then all was excitement, what is now quietude; and our worst fears, instead of our most sanguinary hopes, have been realized. We entered the field with hurried step, and bosoms panting, and eager for the fray. We considered our cause sure to win, for its justice was undoubted. We doubted not for a moment the capabilities of our leaders, or the stamina of their followers. And though the death-shots fell thick and fast around us, yet for a time they were as harmless as ashes of fire in the bosom of the great deep. Our troops pressed forward, shouting and cheering each other on in their holy mission, until we flanked, and finally gained the rear of the enemy. Here we halted for a moment to rest and refresh ourselves, when our position was discovered, and once more we moved forward. We again halted, and delivered a few random shots at the enemy, as they retreated under the double fire of our Brigade and the gallant 69th. While at a halt, it was my lot to witness a very painful scene. I captured a prisoner, (a German) belonging to the 8th South Carolina Regiment, and took him to Major Culbert for instructions as how to dispose of him. The prisoner requested one privilege as his last, which the Major very humanely granted. He said his brother lay a short distance off, in a dying condition, and he wished to see him. I bade him lead the way, and I followed.

He took me to an old log hut a few rods from where our regiment was halted. On the north side, in the shade, we found the wounded man. The prisoner spoke to him—he opened his eyes—the film of death had already overspread them, and the tide of life was fast ebbing. He was covered with blood, and the swarms of flies and musquitoes which were fattening upon his life's blood, indicated that he had lain there for some time. They clasped hands together, muttered a few words in the German language, supplicated the Throne of Grace for their families at home, kissed, and bade each other a final adieu; the prisoner remarking as I took him by the arm to lead him away, for the column was moving, "Brother, you are dying, and I am a prisoner." The man was shot with a musket ball, in the back, just over the hip, from which fact I inferred that he was on the retreat when the deadly ball overtook him.

The country round about seemed to be peculiarly adapted for a defensive position. It was very hilly, and on each elevation a battery was planted, strongly guarded by infantry, whose bayonets we could distinctly see gleaming in the sunlight. So well did they understand the position of matters inside their lines, that if they retreated, it was done for a decoy, and our brave fellows in pursuing them found themselves suddenly surrounded, or cut down like blades of grass, before the scythe, by the rapid and terrible discharges of grape and canister from concealed batteries. At about 2 o'clock, Lieut. Upton, aid-de-camp, rode up, and took position in the centre of our Regiment. He addressed us in substance, as follows: "Boys of Old Connecticut! there is a battery on the brow of yonder hill. I want you to follow me, and you shall have the credit of capturing it. Will you follow?" In a moment we were wild with delight and determination, cheering and waving our caps on our bayonets, waving them in the air, and exhibiting in gratifying tones the patriotism that moved our arms for the ordinal. Just at that moment the considerate Col. Keyes rode up, and on learning the cause of the enthusiasm, remarked that it must not be attempted with a less number of troops than the entire brigade. As the rest of the command were otherwise engaged, the project was abandoned, and a subsequent reconnoitre showed us the madness of the idea, for, on emerging from the woods, we encountered another battery, which the rebels immediately brought to bear upon us. Gen. Tyler, however, paid no attention to the firing, until Col. Keyes ordered

From the files of
John Hennessy

the men to take refuge in the woods, where we lay concealed for a quarter of an hour. And it is a fact, that not a soldier in the ranks had any idea that the order to "retreat" was to abandon the field. When we left our concealment, we came away side by side with the Fire Zouaves, the 70th, and others, who were bearing off their killed and wounded. Of course the great disaster of the day was the panic which spread itself with such velocity through our ranks. Our troops were in good order, and, as far as I observed, in cheerful spirits. The first indication that I noticed was the rapid retreat and disorganized condition of a battery, which I supposed to be Sherman's. This was communicated to the baggage wagons, ambulances, &c; and such a scene of confusion and terror as followed, is utterly indescribable. Yet I trust our people will not construe this act as one of cowardice. Fenwicklike that are by no means unparalleled. The memorable retreat of the French and Sardinians from Castiglione to Brescia, furnishes another instance of how complete a powerful army may be routed sometimes by the most trivial circumstance. The allies then were not as we were at the Run: just leaving the field of carnage, tired, weary, and jaded with long marching, our stomachs empty, and our lips parched with raging thirst. On the contrary, they had rested, and refreshed themselves with wines and cordials, which every French soldier is provided with, previous to an engagement. The occurrence must be fresh in the minds of all your readers.

The only real act of cowardice, unpardonable, unfortunately falls upon the New Haven Grays. — joined the company as a private. After we encamped at Glenwood, he was assigned a position as clerk for the Colonel. He remained in that position for about six weeks, when he was appointed by Col. Terry to fill a vacant post in the non-commissioned Staff. Here he remained until his disgraceful flight from the ~~retreat~~ of Bull's Run into Washington—where, after many acts of kindness by our Congressmen, Hon. James F. English, he was enabled to reach home. Col. Terry, on hearing of the circumstance, immediately reduced him to the ranks, the order being publicly read at dress parade on Saturday evening, which threw him back into the ranks of the "Grays"—which company, before dismissing ranks unanimously voted him out of their ranks, and also instructed their Secretary to notify the young gentleman and all the Press of the City of Elm. A feeling of just indignation was aroused when we read his description given of our retirement from Centerville. The facts of the case are: Col. Terry's horse becoming unmanageable, he gave it to — who had once, within my hearing solicited the privilege of riding, to retain until he called for it; whereupon he started for the former house, and from thence he continued his flight until he delivered "news" to the New Haven Palladium. But I will not follow the theme further. If we are fortunate enough to return home, we can tell the story with our own lips. I cannot close this epistle without thanking you

for the free gift of the JOURNAL AND COURIER, which has come to hand so promptly since our departure from home. Hon. John Woodruff has been very kind to us in supplying reading matter; but of course his gifts could not be as fresh as those that came direct from the office. The coarse fare incident to camp life, affected materially the health of some of our men; but now they are where they can buy fresh food, and are fast recovering their former health. Hoping soon to see you face to face,
I remain yours, truly,
G.