

Richeson Democrat & American, 7/27/62

Fort Bennett, Va., July 22, 1861.

FRANK C.—Yesterday (Sunday) was a day that will long be remembered. At 2 o'clock we were called up by the bugle note of our brigade, to march. About 7 o'clock Sherman's battery and a thirty-two pounder opened fire upon the rebels, who were first found sneaking in and around the woods, near where we were formed in battle order. A few men of the 12th were permitted to get water, and while filling their canteens were fired upon by the enemy, but none of them were hurt. Almost immediately, the first division of the 12th (Capt. Perryman's and Murray's Companies) were ordered on to the hill as scouts, and quite a number of shots were exchanged. Presently, a large number of rebels were seen flying over the hills in all directions—few shells from our battery helping them along. S. P. Atlas was with us, busily engaged with the glass, giving decisive information; and discovered a large body of troops advancing, who were supposed to be Col. Hiram's column, who shortly engaged the rebels with a very warm and destructive fire. The 6th, 12th, 7th and 3d Wisconsin, were then ordered to the scene of action—about two miles to the left of us. On went these four regiments. The 12th stripped off all their blankets, &c., and marched on in double quick, through the woods and fields of grain, till we came to the stream called Half's Run—a nasty, stinky creek at the foot of a very steep and rocky hill, about 95 feet wide and 5 feet deep. Here the 6th were detained somewhat, notwithstanding the valiantness of officers to dash through it. The 12th went through it with a hop, skip and jump movement. Here came the cry that the rebels were running! On, on, went our men, with the Stars and Stripes over our heads. Arriving upon the hill, the 6th opened a tremendous fire upon the enemy, as they were flying in all directions, and the 12th did great execution with their rifles. The enemy, of course, took to the woods, where their dead and mangled bodies were.

Our forces were immediately drawn up in order, and marched up to the work like veterans, under a tremendous cross fire from the enemy's batteries, grape, D. B's, canisters and shell falling like hail stones among us; but down the hill we advanced—double quick—and drove them off into the woods again. The enemy then rallied with renewed vigor, and succeeded in scattering our lines terribly. Just then the 12th advanced, and held the hill against a tremendous fire, for some time. I thank God we were the very last to leave it, retreating gradually—after being ordered the second time—loading and firing as we did so. At this point the 12th suffered considerable loss. Our officers—had these then—were true and brave.

The whole of our army was finally driven off, completely routed and broken up, and the greatest confusion; and was followed as far back as Centerville, and I don't know but further—Just before we reached Centerville, the enemy opened one of their masked batteries upon the wounded, who were being conveyed in carriages to the Centerville Hospital. Here one of the most wicked and heart-rending scenes took place, I think, that was ever known. No living man can describe it. We had no cannon to return the fire, and our rifles and muskets were of no use. The only thing we could do was to run. The horses attached to the wagons, which were loaded with wounded, became frightened, and ran like an angry deer through the woods, smashing the carriages, and dashing the wounded against the stones, stumps and trees—how we heartily cried for revenge.

After getting out of the woods, and into another road, I found a small dog, which I seized, and gaining a position on an open hill, (supposing the enemy were following us) I called out aloud to the soldiers to stand, and fight till the last breath of life was gone, rather than our wounded should be butchered by such devils. They rallied! Yes, they stood, and we got about one hundred and fifty men together, and with our little dog was marched on till we found we were safe, and then we parted, each to his own regiment.

CHAS. C. DEWEY, of Company A, who had been my right hand man ever since the company organized, was wounded. He was shot twice—in the neck and arm—at the time the 12th advanced upon the hill, where the enemy's fire was so severe. His friends got him a horse, upon which he was conveyed, under a guard, to the Centerville Hospital. His wounds were dressed, and he is not considered dangerously wounded.

There are great many of the 12th missing, but I don't think there are many killed, compared to some other regiments. In Company A, I think none were killed. After leaving the battle field, I saw only a few of the 12th, as they, like all the rest, were scattered along the road during the entire retreat back to Washington, which was ordered, as an attack upon the Capital was anticipated by the General in command.

It was a hard day's work, I assure you; but there was no grumbling. We were obliged to march all night, arriving in camp about 7 or 8 o'clock the next morning, and immediately packed up our traps and started for Fort Bennett, which lies just back of Georgetown, and a little to the left of Fort Detting. It is the same that the 12th worked upon.

The 12th lost none of its officers, that I know of. As regards myself, I am all right, only a little sore and stiff. There were a great many officers of different companies, killed—the work of the enemy's sharpshooters.

There are various reports in circulation. Some say that Mr. Atlas was killed, but I do not generally believe.

A. G. C.

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