

Letter from Company G.

The following letter from an officer in Company G, Second Regiment Rhode Island Volunteers, giving an account of the battle of last Sunday, will be read with interest. It was addressed to a prominent citizen of this town. It seems that our Company passed thirty-six hours almost wholly without food, or drink, or sleep.

CAMP CLARK, Washington, D. C., }
July 23d, 1861. }

FRIEND ———:—I suppose, ere this, you have heard of our battle and defeat; but thinking that you would like an account from an eye-witness, I will give it to you. We left our camp at Centerville at two o'clock on Sunday morning, and, after marching about ten miles, we engaged the rebels. The Second Rhode Island Regiment was in the advance, two companies on each side of the road acting as skirmishers, and my own company was the advance company on the road, marching by the flank in four ranks. We were marching in the woods, and could not see where the enemy were, when Col. Hunter came riding down to us and said, "Now, Rhode Islanders, we expect much of you—give it to them!" We assured him we would do it. We then leaped over a fence and found the enemy drawn up in line and ready for us. We rushed down upon them, firing as fast as we could, but they outnumbered us, and being armed with Minie rifles, cut us completely to pieces. Through some mismanagement, our regiment was engaged with the rebels thirty minutes before any other troops came on the field, receiving a most galling fire. Within the space of ten minutes, Cols. Hunter and Slocum, Major Ballou and Capt. Tower fell, which was a severe loss to commence with. Our men fought like bull-dogs. During the thirty minutes we were all alone on the field our men expended all their ammunition, and we had to rob the dead to last till we were ordered off to replenish. The rebels are armed with first-rate arms, and use them well. They would bring out an American flag in their line and keep it there until they could rally their men in the bushes, and then make a rush upon us. In this way they deceived us.

Our light battery worked first-rate, but was obliged to leave the field for want of ammunition. After a fight of about five hours we were ordered to retreat. On our way back the enemy opened a masked battery upon us, and killed a great many men and horses, and took the light battery, except one piece. The Rhode Island Second Regiment received the highest praise from army officers and the citizens of Washington, for the prompt manner in which they went into battle. The greatest compliment I heard was that of an officer in the army, saying, that if it became necessary to cover the retreat, he should be obliged to take the Rhode Island Regiments and the Regulars to do it, which I thought was very good.

Major Ballou was in the midst of the battle, acting bravely, when a cannon ball passed through his horse, shattering the Major's leg, to pieces, so that they had to take it off. Our retreat was so hasty that we left both dead and wounded. How they will fare the Lord only knows. These rebels are a blood-thirsty set.

You can imagine the shape the men are in at present, when you know that we marched from 2 o'clock in the morning, without any breakfast, ten miles, and immediately attacked the enemy without resting at all; and then our retreat was so sudden that we could not rest. The distance to Washington was thirty miles, which we were obliged to make before we halted, all without any food except what we could carry in our haversacks, and this we were obliged to throw away. So you see we were on our feet without rest from 2 o'clock Sunday morning, till eight o'clock Monday morning, when we arrived at Long Bridge. The men's feet are in a very bad condition. I never knew what it was to suffer for water before, being obliged to dip it up in the road all muddy, and drink it mud and all. It does not become me to give my opinion of this battle and its management, but I have one; and you will, after you have read the whole account.

You must excuse the manner in which this is put together, for I have been writing all day making reports, and thought I would write you, if it was late.