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Infantry: Beverly Ford

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Title: History of the Second Massachusetts Regiment of Infantry: Beverly Ford

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Release date: September 12, 2007 [eBook #22586]

Language: English

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HISTORY OF THE SECOND
MASSACHUSETTS REGIMENT OF INFANTRY: BEVERLY FORD ***

H I S T O R Y

OF THE

SECOND MASSACHUSETTS REGIMENT OF INFANTRY.

BEVERLY FORD.

A PAPER READ AT THE OFFICERS' REUNION IN BOSTON,
MAY 12, 1884,

BY

DANIEL OAKEY,

CAPTAIN SECOND MASSACHUSETTS REGIMENT OF INFANTRY.

BOSTON:
GEO. H. ELLIS, PRINTER, 141 FRANKLIN STREET.
1884.

BEVERLY FORD.

JUNE 9, 1863.

IN taking up the thread of Captain George A. Thayer's admirable chapter upon the Chancellorsville campaign, we find the regiment baling out their old log pens, on a dark night, in the rain. They had stripped the canvas roofs before starting for Chancellorsville. The return to a deserted camp, even in fine weather, flushed with victory, is not agreeable. The failure of Chancellorsville made the discomforts of this memorable night harder to bear, and it seemed very much like some of the worst experiences of the "Mud campaign."

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Company "D" pursued their work with vigor, and sang with the broadest sarcasm "Home Again." This had rather an enlivening effect upon some of the other companies, who, up to this time, had been very silent. Daylight relieved us all; and, with sunshine and regimental "police," the place soon looked as if nothing had happened, except for the late absentees, some of whom would return when their wounds permitted; but others would never again draw their swords under the old battle-flag. The scholarly Fitzgerald, who died so bravely, was the only officer of "ours" killed at Chancellorsville.

It was at this very camp, about a month before, that the gallant and lamented Colonel Shaw, then a captain in our regiment, left us to organize and command that fated battalion, the "Fifty-fourth Colored Massachusetts." Here, we again formed a mess with the officers of the Third Wisconsin; and our former caterer, Charley Johnson, and his colored staff, managed the *table d'hôte*. Those who were fortunate enough to be present will remember the surprise party given to us by the officers of the Third Wisconsin in our canvas dining-room, at the foot of the hill, and how it burst upon us in all its splendor of bayonet chandeliers and unlimited "commissary." Brigade manœuvres and battalion drills were diligently practised; and, when Casey's tactics were scarcely dry from the press, Colonel Sam Quincy, with the least possible preparation on our part, "sprung" on us the new movement of "Forward on the centre to form square" at "double-quick." And, I am ashamed to say, that, practised as we were in all the tricks of field manœuvres, we "got mixed." The right wing started without delay for Falmouth, the left wing for Acquia Creek, and the color division took a steady trot for the camp of the Tenth Maine. Adjutant Fox galloped wildly about the field, the Colonel howled in despair, but on we went till the word "Halt!" brought us to a stand, and we came back and formed line. The Colonel then made the memorable remark, "Gentlemen will please to have some connection of ideas," and started the machine again at full speed. This time we melted into a square in a manner which would have pleased General Andrews. From this camp, Colonel Quincy resigned, pretty well exhausted with wounds, exposure, and the trials of the Rebel prison.

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We now moved camp—Major Mudge commanding—to a pine grove, where we constructed quite a picturesque military village, and became absorbed in the habits and peculiarities of the wood-tick.

The days rolled on into June; and it seemed fully time to be doing something more about beating Lee, whose lieutenants were successfully screening their preparations for the coming Northern invasion. General Halleck, General-in-Chief at Washington, was still busily engaged telegraphing to the generals in the field; and, no doubt, Hooker was hampered by these voluminous instructions, often so at variance with his own plans, which were apt to be excellent, and he was unable at times to suppress his own dominant and rather insubordinate spirit.

On the 5th of June, Stuart was discovered concentrating his troopers in great force at Culpepper. Mr. Stuart's "Critter-back Company" was supposed to number about twelve thousand sabres, and information obtained by General Buford showed that the Rebels were preparing for a cavalry raid on a scale never before attempted.

Here was an opportunity for the "Cavalry Corps" which Hooker had organized; but, owing to the wear and tear of Stoneman's raid, General Hooker thought our cavalry weak to cope with the enemy, if their numbers as reported were correct. He decided, however, to send General Pleasanton with all the cavalry to attack Stuart, "stiffened," as he expressed it, with about five thousand infantry.

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This "stiffening" consisted of a few selected regiments, including "ours," to be divided equally between two columns of cavalry,—one under Buford, with Ames to command his infantry, the other under Gregg, with General David Russell as infantry commander.

The total force of infantry was probably not more than three thousand, as each regiment was thinned down by weeding out every man who could not be relied upon for a forced march. The order came on the afternoon of June 6 to "get ready in light marching order for a secret expedition, leaving all sick and baggage behind." The news soon spread through camp, and friends from other regiments came to witness the departure of the chosen. Upon learning that the Third Wisconsin was not included in the order, the enthusiasm in the Second Massachusetts was considerably dampened. "The Third" was certain that there must be some mistake in the transmission of the order. These two regiments had been brigaded together since the beginning of the war, and had fought side by side in every action. There was a sense of mutual support, and a desire to share equally all the honors; a strong feeling of pride in each regarding the

achievements of the other. To us, it would have been unnatural to go into action without the Third Wisconsin, or at least not to know that they were in support. A hasty consultation resulted in sending an officer to present the case at head-quarters. The chaplain's excellent mare was summarily pressed for the service; and our ambassador, springing into the clerical saddle, shot away for General Ruger's head-quarters. He returned with an encouraging word that the General would see what could be done.

The column was already moving out of camp, under the gaze of a crowd of officers and men. It seemed quite a family affair, as we noticed the "Thirty-third Massachusetts" already on the road waiting for us, under the fatherly protection of Colonel Underwood, who had been so long a member of "ours" as captain of "the bloody I's." Opinions were exchanged as to the probability of the Third Wisconsin getting its orders. Bets, of course, were freely offered and taken on the chances. Meantime, we were joined by a battery of horse artillery and a string of pack mules carrying extra ammunition. Presently, a battalion appeared coming over the hill at a pace indicating important business. Our cheering was taken up by the rest of the column; and the Third Wisconsin replied with wild howls, and quickly took their place as part of our special brigade.

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After a furious thunder-shower, which laid the dust, General Ames gave the word; and the command moved off at a smart gait. The air was cool, and every member of the chosen band was in high spirits. Even that army-trodden country, under the circumstances, and with the influence of a beautiful sunset, looked fresh and picturesque.

There was evidently a strong impression that we were able-bodied to the last man; for we skipped along for eight miles without a halt, in a style which impressed our cavalry friends, whom we found about eight o'clock in the evening drawn up in a field at the roadside, to give us the right of way. A voice came from one of the saddles, "I say, boys! what brigade?" "Ah, you recruit!" replied one of the wits of the regiment: "don't you know this brigade? This is Gordon's flying brigade,"—which was received with much merriment. The men were in excellent humor, ready to bandy words with any one, especially the cavalry, whom they began to divine they were to operate with. This elegant repartee was kept up all along the line. Occasionally, officers exchanged greetings, where friends could make each other out in the dark. A hasty word and shake of the hand (perhaps the last), and our cavalry friend is left still watching the column as it marches briskly along. Another cavalry detachment inquires: "What's your hurry, boys? Where are you going?"

"We're going to Richmond. Saddle up, you cowards, and come along!" A soldier in the next company, of an inquiring disposition, asks, "Who ever saw a dead cavalry man?"

We bivouacked near Spotted Tavern, about eleven o'clock at night; and, after this lively march of sixteen miles, we were allowed a comfortable rest, while the cavalry occupied the road.

Resuming our march at ten o'clock next day, we reached Bealton about sunset, and were carefully concealed in the woods. Lighting of fires was absolutely forbidden; and, as the night closed in upon us, the staff remained in the saddle, stationed at different points, silently watching us; and, as morning came again, there they were still on the watch.

Meantime, General Russell had marched his infantry to Hartwood Church, and thence to a point near Kelly's Ford, where General Gregg was concentrating two divisions of cavalry.

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The night of the 8th, we moved down very near Beverly Ford into the woods again,—cold suppers and no lights. The men were exceedingly restless at these unusual orders about light and noise. In a letter from one of my men since the war, he says: "The men thought we were being humbugged, and there were many signs of dissatisfaction. They complained because we were not allowed to have fires. Dave Orne was punished (ordered to stand at attention) by you, for snapping a cap upon his gun. It was exceedingly galling to his soldierly pride, as it was the only time he was punished during his term of service. Hyde was particularly insubordinate; and you were placed in arrest, because Company 'D' was so disorderly."

I remember this very well, and my servant standing at a respectful distance, holding my sabre while I was under this temporary cloud. The gallant commander of the "Irish Brigade," as we called Company "H," shared the cloud with me; for he was placed in arrest at the same time. Our sabres, however, were returned to us before we got into the fight; and, in the evening bivouac, our commander made us a most graceful apology over a tin mug of "commissary."

Buford's whole column was now concealed in the woods. The cheerful clank and jingle of the cavalry was, by some means, suppressed; there was no merry bugle breaking upon the still hours of the night; and, as the moon threw deep shadows across the quiet country road, there seemed no trace of "grim-visaged war."

At three o'clock in the morning, Captain Comey, with thirty picked men from the Second Massachusetts, crept down to the river-bank, to see that all was clear for the advance. He reported a large force of cavalry in bivouac on the south side of the river, quite unconscious of Buford's stealthy approach. Indeed, Jones' Rebel cavalry brigade was only a short distance from the Ford, while his wagons and artillery were parked even nearer to the river. Fitz Hugh Lee, Robertson, and W. H. F. Lee were in bivouac at various points within supporting distance of Jones; while Wade Hampton was passing the night in picturesque reserve at Fleetwood Hill.

The spot was admirably adapted for a cavalry battle, the country rolling along, with an occasional clump of woods and fine open fields, toward Brandy Station, where the Rebel cavalry-chief,

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Stuart, had pitched his head-quarters.

The close proximity of Stuart's troopers was a little unexpected. Their movement to Beverly Ford, it seems, was simultaneous with our own.

The plan was to have the enemy remain somewhere near Culpepper, while Gregg's column advanced from Kelly's Ford, and Buford's from Beverly Ford, the first bearing to the left, the latter to the right, the two columns to form a junction near Brandy Station. General Pleasanton then, having our entire force well in hand, would make a determined attack upon Stuart's squadrons. But it is the unexpected which must be looked for in war, and the necessary tactics were quickly decided upon.

Nearly the whole of Stuart's force was in our immediate front; but they would be exposed to the disadvantage of a surprise, and, having no infantry with them, our little brigade of rifles would be doubly effective.

General Pleasanton would be unable to control and harmonize the movements of his two columns, being completely cut off from General Gregg; but the latter was so well known as an able commander and a hard fighter that the enemy was certain to be treated again to a surprise in flank and rear, and would be thus diverted from our front. And it seemed as if we might still succeed in breaking up the enemy's cavalry.

The situation had its advantages, in spite of the opinion of some distinguished cavalry men; and "Forward!" was the word.

As the hazy June morning dawned upon us, troopers appeared to rise out of the ground and swarm out of the woods, till the whole country seemed alive with cavalry; and Ames' picked rifles took their place in the column.

The early morning mist, hanging upon the river banks, concealed our approach.

"In both our armies, there is many a soul
Shall pay full dearly for this encounter,
If once they join in trial."

The gallant and lamented Colonel Davis led the way with the Eighth New York Cavalry, dashing over the Ford and surprising the enemy's pickets, who fell back upon Jones' exposed artillery and wagons.

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The Rebels were panic-stricken at the sudden approach of the "Yankee" cavalry; and great confusion ensued. But the alarm quickly spread, and part of Jones' troopers were soon in the saddle, charging furiously down upon the Eighth New York, who broke; and, before Colonel Davis could turn to rally his leading regiment, a Rebel soldier sprang from behind a tree and shot him dead. But the avenging sabre of Lieutenant Parsons (Davis' adjutant) severed the poor fellow's connection with this life.

Colonel Davis was a serious loss to the "Cavalry Corps,"—a graduate of West Point, an accomplished officer, a universal favorite,—and, although a Southerner, he stuck to the flag he had sworn to defend.

Meantime, the Eighth Illinois Cavalry had gained the southern bank, and rushed upon Jones' people, driving them back upon the main body, who were forming in the rear of a bit of wood. Colonel Davis was borne back in a blanket as General Pleasanton, who had accompanied our column in person, arrived at the river bank.

The Third Indiana Cavalry followed the Eighth Illinois; and Ames' men were now crossing under the eye of the distinguished group of horsemen, to one of whom (Colonel F. C. Newhall, afterward of Sheridan's staff) I am indebted for the following description:—

General Buford was there, with his usual smile. He rode a gray horse, at a slow walk generally, and smoked a pipe, no matter what was going on around him; and it was always reassuring to see him in the saddle when there was any chance of a fight.

General Pleasanton's staff was partly composed of men who became distinguished. The Adjutant General was A. J. Alexander, of Kentucky, a very handsome fellow, who was afterward a Brigadier General with Thomas, in the West. Among the aides was Captain Farnsworth, Eighth Illinois Cavalry, who so distinguished himself in the coming battle, and in the subsequent operations south of the Potomac, that he was made a Brigadier General, and with that rank fell at Gettysburg, at the head of a brigade of cavalry which he had commanded but a few days. Another aide was the brilliant Custer, then a lieutenant, whose career and lamented death there is no need to recall. Another was Lieutenant R. S. McKenzie, of the engineers, now General McKenzie of well-won fame, the youngest colonel of the regular army; and still another was Ulric Dahlgren. General Pleasanton had certainly no lack of intelligence, dash, and hard-riding to rely on in those about him.

The infantry had now cleared the woods of the enemy's troopers, who were deceived as to the number of our rifles, and showed no inclination to expose men and horses to the deadly fire of experienced infantry skirmishers.

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The old, time-honored Second Dragoons, the Fifth Regulars, and that crack young regiment, the Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry (forming what was known as the "Reserve Brigade"), were massing

on the southern bank of the river. The sharp report of infantry rifles, the rising smoke, and the thousand indescribable sounds, with the tramp of fresh cavalry pressing forward to take their part in the fray, showed that the battle was now waging in good earnest. The wounded arrived more rapidly at the ford, stretcher-bearers plying their trade in the hot sun.

The soft, dewy grass of the morning was now kicked and trampled into dry dust. The infantry held the enemy in the open space beyond the woods; while Buford hurled his squadrons, with drawn sabres, upon the Rebel cavalry on the right and left.

A sabre charge, with both sides going at top speed, is, perhaps, the most exciting and picturesque combination of force, nerve, and courage that can be imagined. The commanding officers leading in conspicuous advance; the rush, the thunder of horses' hoofs; the rattle of arms and equipments,—all mingling with the roar of voices, while the space rapidly lessens between the approaching squadrons. The commanders who were seen, a moment before, splendidly mounted, dashing on at racing speed, turning in the saddle to look back at the tidal wave which they are leading, disappear in a cloud of sabres, clashing and cutting; but the fight is partly obscured by the rising dust and the mist from the over-heated animals. Riderless horses come, wounded and trembling, out of the *mêlée*; others appear, running in fright, carrying dying troopers still sitting their chargers, the head drooping on the breast, the sword-arm hanging lifeless, the blood-stained sabre dangling from the wrist, tossing, swinging, and cutting the poor animal's flanks, goading him on in his aimless flight. In this moment of intense excitement, the Rebels give way on the left. Our troopers follow in hot pursuit. On they go, over the dead and dying. At the sound of the "recall," back they come, to take breath and re-form at the rallying ground to which Ames' skirmishers move forward, to regain their connection and establish a more advanced line of battle. Although the infantry occupied the centre of the line, their operations were not confined to this point. They were sent in small detachments to different parts of the field, to support artillery, and, at times, even to engage the enemy, when opportunity offered. The line officers bore a thorough test of their experience and training during a day of perpetual activity.

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The "Reserve Brigade" had gone into action. There were to be no fresh troops in waiting. Every one was needed at the front.

The Rebels made desperate attempts to capture the ford, and pressed us hard on the right. This part of our line made little progress, and was forced at times to assume simply the defensive.

Two squadrons of the Second Dragoons were withdrawn to assist in covering the approaches to the ford.

The Rebels made another desperate charge. It seemed, this time, as if they would carry all before them. But we stood our ground, and opened on them at close quarters with the guns; and Ames' men plied their rifles, making every bullet tell. The enemy lost heavily, and came to a stand. The Dragoons dropped their carbines, and, drawing sabres, rushed upon them, driving them off in confusion.

It was hot work all along the line; and, although our cavalry suffered severely at times, nothing could surpass their gallant conduct.

The Sixth Pennsylvania, in charging the enemy near St. James' Church, were badly punished by the Rebel artillery, and had to withdraw with heavy loss of officers, men, and horses. Their gallant commander, Major Morris, whose horse fell upon him, was left a prisoner in the enemy's hands. The Second Dragoons also suffered severely at this point.

Much to our relief, the enemy now appeared to be attacked in the rear, as they made no further attempt to capture the ford, and the force in our front was evidently reduced.

A Rebel battery now opened from a bit of woods about six hundred yards in front, while we were making disposition to advance our right, and our guns unlimbered upon a knoll in the open fields in front and to the right of the ford; and a lively cannonade ensued. I was skirmishing nearer to the centre of the line with my own company and Company "F," the latter under command of Captain, then Lieutenant, Parker, and was ordered with these two companies to support the guns on the knoll. On the way, I was joined by Colonel, then Captain, Stevenson of the Third Wisconsin, who had been ordered to the same duty. General Buford and some staff officers were standing near the guns, their horses awaiting them in the rear, where the artillery horses had taken refuge.

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Part of the Tenth Virginia Cavalry were on foot behind a stone wall down in the open fields in front; and they endeavored to interfere with us as much as possible while we were posting Lieutenant Parker with two men as a "lookout" to apprise us of any movement on the part of the enemy. They had already annoyed our artillery very much, popping at them with their carbines.

Captain Stevenson and I lay down with our companies in the usual position of artillery supports, about thirty yards in rear, while our guns belched forth their fire and smoke, and the enemy's shells came howling overhead and bursting behind us with that spiteful, sharp, clean-cut bang which we used to know so well.

Having nothing to do as yet but smoke our pipes, we lolled on the grass and studied our cavalry friends. Custer was the most striking figure in the group, with his fanciful uniform, his long hair, and spirited manner. He seemed to enjoy the shelling, and appeared to beam all over, almost

dancing with excitement.

Other staff officers arrived from time to time, and, plunging into the group, on their reeking horses, spoke to General Buford, and then dashed away again. The fight seemed still going on in the centre and on the left, which had advanced considerably; but our view was somewhat obstructed by clumps of woods.

General Buford, whom we had never seen before, impressed us with his commanding presence and his manly and picturesque simplicity of dress. He looked as if his division might idolize him, as it was said they did. He seemed much annoyed at the Tenth Virginia Cavalry behind the wall, and at last summoned the commander of the infantry supports. Although Stevenson commanded, he wished me to assist at the audience; and we were at the General's side in a moment, looking over the guns at the surrounding country.

"Do you see those people down there?" says Buford: "they've got to be driven out. Do you think you can do it?" [Page 11]

We looked up and down the line, and rested our gaze upon a wheat-field on the left of the stone wall (the enemy's right).

"It's about double our force," says Stevenson.

"Fully that," I replied, "if not more."

We looked again at the wheat-field, for that was the key to the position. Something was said about "flanking" and "enfilading 'em."

"Mind," said the General, "I don't order you; but, if you think you can do it, go in."

We thought we could. It would hardly do to back out in the presence of so distinguished a cavalry audience, if there was a chance of success. A number of the staff had gathered round to hear our conversation, and showed a great deal of interest at the prospect of a little "side show," at which they would have orchestra chairs, front row.

The General, with this group around him, was drawing the fire of the stone wall people, and was urged to keep out of range, while the rest of us scattered to less dangerous positions. Some of the staff came back and watched the men "fall in," as if to see us off. Custer showed much interest, and evidently would have enjoyed going with us.

We struck back into the country, and took a circuitous route behind hedges and through corn-fields, Stevenson and myself running on together, and the men following with their rifles as low as possible, and crouching along to avoid attracting any notice.

We planned the attack as we went along, instructing sergeants, who in turn fell back and gave orders to the men. Upon arriving at the wheat-field, we all hugged the ground. Ten picked marksmen now crawled forward with me into the wheat, while Captain Stevenson deployed the rest of the men into as long a skirmish line as their numbers would permit.

We despatched a messenger to notify Lieutenant Parker, whom we had left near the guns, to join us at once. In justice to Parker, I must say that he hated to be left out of a fight.

The ten marksmen crawled on through the wheat, till they were almost "on the end" of the enemy's line; and then, crowding together so as to rake the line, they fired at the signal, with terrible accuracy.

The Rebels were completely surprised, but turned and delivered a scattering fire. My excellent Sergeant Nutting fell into my arms mortally wounded. He was all pluck to the last moment. Although he could not speak, he showed signs of wishing to bid us good-by, and was evidently gratified at the manner in which we tenderly shook him by the hand. It was a success for the company, but the men all seemed to share my own feeling that it was dearly bought at such a price. [Page 12]

Meantime, Captain Stevenson was advancing through the wheat; and, as soon as my party fired, he began making noise enough for two regiments. We sprang over the fence into the open field; and there we found Lieutenant Parker standing on the stone wall, pistol in hand, with his two men and the messenger, demanding "unconditional surrender."

We could not help being amused at Parker's sudden appearance; but he explained that he was afraid that he would be too late, and so "charged the stone wall in front, and took the chances."

Stevenson's men were coming over the fence all the way down the wheat; and the enemy, utterly deceived as to our numbers, had already commenced dropping their weapons and giving themselves up. We hurried them off as rapidly as possible, and gave all the care we could to the wounded. Some of the Rebels at the other end of the wall tried to escape; but Stevenson had swung his line round so promptly that he covered them at short range, and persuaded the runaways to come in. Having killed, wounded, and captured the entire party, we retired to a rising ground to the left of our own guns, and covered the approaches to the stone wall by posting some sharp-shooters with their pieces sighted at three hundred yards. At this distance, two of the enemy's dismounted troopers were killed. This seemed to be sufficient warning to the rest, who made no further attempt to occupy the stone wall.

General Buford now advanced the right of the line, and pressed forward, driving the enemy's

cavalry before him toward Fleetwood Hill. General Gregg, who had relieved us at such a critical moment by diverting the enemy from our front, had crossed Kelly's Ford at daylight with little opposition, and left General Russell with his infantry to guard the lower fords.

Colonel Duffie's division was sent to Stevensburg, where they encountered the enemy, and drove them through and beyond the town, with our friends of the First Massachusetts Cavalry in the advance; and here Colonel Duffie remained, according to the original plan. [Page 13]

General Gregg pushed on toward Brandy Station with Kilpatrick's and Windham's brigades. The latter attacked the Rebel cavalry so promptly that they were scarcely ready for him. Stuart's head-quarters were captured and important despatches fell into our hands, with valuable information as to the enemy's plans. Windham and Kilpatrick were both hotly engaged as troops were withdrawn from Buford's front to resist them.

Gregg's people fought hard, charging repeatedly with the sabre, and gradually gaining the crest of Fleetwood Hill. The Sixth New York Light Battery did their full share of work.

More troops were withdrawn from Buford's front; and, at last, General Gregg, finding himself overmatched, withdrew to the foot of the hill, leaving two guns in the enemy's hands. Colonel H. S. Thomas describes the cannoneers reluctantly obeying the order to leave the guns, some of the men actually shedding tears.

Meanwhile, General Buford continued to push the enemy toward Fleetwood, and again the Rebels began to resist us more stubbornly. Both sides charged repeatedly with the sabre, and at times dismounted to fight behind stone walls, Ames' rifles making themselves generally useful at various points in the field.

In one very spirited charge of the Second Dragoons, General Merritt, then a captain, rode impetuously on, not hearing the recall, followed by Lieutenant Quirk. He noticed a prominent Rebel officer, and, riding toward him, bringing his sabre to a point, he innocently remarked, "Colonel, you are my prisoner!" The officer made a cut at his head: Merritt, dexterously parrying the cut, only lost his hat. His opponent turned out to be Colonel, afterward, General Wade Hampton. Lieutenant Quirk called out to Merritt, "We're surrounded!" and, sure enough, a Rebel ring had formed to see the "Yankee" officer brought down. But Merritt and Quirk had not been taught to ride for nothing, and galloped safely back into our lines, amid a shower of pistol bullets.

General Rodenbough, then a captain, and many others of the cavalry, had personal encounters, in which they proved themselves to be excellent swordsmen.

As our two columns drew nearer together, both aiming for Fleetwood Hill, the junction was at last accomplished; and General Gregg rode into our lines, reporting a heavy force of Rebel infantry pouring into Brandy Station from Culpepper by rail. [Page 14]

General Pleasanton not caring to encounter the Rebel infantry, especially after a day of such hard pounding, ordered General Gregg to withdraw by way of Rappahannock Station; and Colonel Newhall was sent to tell Buford to stop fighting, and go home by way of Beverly Ford.

The operation of withdrawal was accomplished without interference, the enemy contenting themselves with looking on from a respectful distance. As we approached Beverly Ford, the First Regular Cavalry turned up, eager for the fray. They had been off on some detached duty and were too late for any of the fun, so General Pleasanton had them all deployed as mounted skirmishers to cover the crossing of the troops.

The scene at the ford was very picturesque. A lovely sunset shed its cool light over the long columns of cavalry winding their way toward the river, and the mounted skirmishers were thrown in bold relief against the brilliant sky.

Captain Comey took his old position again, with his little band of thirty men, on the north bank of the river, and remained there till morning, when he rejoined the regiment.

Our bivouac the night of the battle was unusually cheerful, for we had brought every officer of "ours" safely out of the fight alive and well. Even Captain Frank Crowninshield, who generally got a bullet into him somewhere, came off, like the Irishman at the fair, with only a hole in the crown of his hat.

Many a fence rail was burned to give light to the conference which was held over the events of the day. We had been so separated during the fight that the experiences of each one had to be presented to the assemblage in turn; and, with the assistance of some of the Third Wisconsin officers, the comparing of notes was extended far into the night.

Our forces had gained all they set out to accomplish. The momentous cavalry schemes of the enemy were frustrated, and their troopers had been severely punished by cavalry which they had always considered inferior to their own.

The disheartening effect throughout the Confederacy may be guessed by the following extract from a diary kept by Mr. I. D. Jones, the Rebel War Clerk at Richmond:— [Page 15]

June 12.—The surprise of Stuart on the Rappahannock has chilled every heart, notwithstanding it does not appear that we lost more than the enemy in the encounter. The question is on every tongue, Have our generals relaxed in vigilance? If so, sad is the prospect.

After the long period of mismanagement, disaster, sacrifice, blood, and tears through which the Army of the Potomac had passed, with steadiness of purpose and undaunted courage which has never been surpassed, the turning-point came, at last, in the brilliant conflict at Beverly Ford, or "Fleetwood," as the Rebel chief, Stuart, called it.

It was a severe blow to the enemy's cavalry at the right moment, and was productive of important results, being followed by Pleasanton in the battles of Aldie, Middleburg, and Upperville, holding Stuart in check and keeping Hooker fully informed as to the movements of the enemy; while General Lee was in constant anxiety and in want of information during his march up the Cumberland Valley and, in fact, during the whole of the Gettysburg campaign. On the 27th of June, General Hooker requested to be relieved, and General Mead assumed command of the Army of the Potomac.

This change of commanders was accomplished while the two great armies were in motion. There was no excitement over it. The Army of the Potomac was not very sorry to part with General Hooker, nor specially pleased to be commanded by Mead. On the whole, they had more confidence in the latter; but the main object was to beat Lee.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HISTORY OF THE SECOND MASSACHUSETTS REGIMENT OF INFANTRY: BEVERLY FORD ***

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