

CHAPTER X.

Sheridan In Command-----For The First Time We Are
Part Of An Army Equal To The Opposing Enemy-----
March To Cedar Creek-----Skirmish On Three Top-----
March Back Again-----Battle Of Halltown, August
26th-----List Of Casualties-----Battle Of Berryville,
September 3d-----List Of Casualties.

A new era had now dawned upon the Valley, and its little army, that had been buffeted about for so long, was now to enter upon a new experience. The 6th and 19th corps were here. Large bodies of cavalry, under the best officers of the army, were arriving from the Potomac Army. Our own men were being well supplied with clothing, well fed, and allowed to rest up thoroughly, without even camp duty to perform. Stragglers, the sick, and the sore and lame from over-marching when barefooted, were flocking to us in large numbers, and we soon showed a good line again. One hundred days men were everywhere relieving veterans from guard and post duty, and our "Army of West Virginia," as Crook's 8th corps was henceforth to be known in history, grew apace in strength and *esprit de corps*. So that when we moved up the Valley, on the 10th of August, Sheridan's army numbered about 40,000 men, of which nearly 10,000 were cavalry, with twenty six-gun batteries. Our corps was on the left, the 6th on the right, and the 19th in the centre. This order was observed throughout the campaign. Our brigade was on the left of the first division, and our regiment on the left of the brigade. The 116th was thus on the extreme left flank of the first line of the army. It occupied this place in every battle of the campaign. Let history tell how it performed the duties of that important position.

On the 10th the whole army moved up the Valley, and we camped that night near Berryville. On the 11th we marched eighteen miles further, much of the time in line of battle, with heavy firing all the afternoon by the cavalry and its artillery in our front. This was a very hot, sultry day, and as we marched, most of the time under cover of woods, where no air was stirring, we suffered terribly from the heat, but our men stood it remarkably well. We were near the Shenandoah River until near the middle of the afternoon and yet our men suffered considerably for want of water, not being allowed to go to the river for it. Sometime before dark, having marched in line of battle for a considerable distance, we were ordered to load. Fred Shofforth, of Company E, had loaded, and, when capping his gun, it was accidentally discharged, killing a fine young soldier of his company named Nathaniel Ady. It was a sad sight to see the poor boy die there from such a careless cause. We buried him decently, and, after prayer by the Chaplain, fired a volley over his grave, at which we placed a head board on which was inscribed his name, company and regiment. We again advanced in line of battle with loaded guns, expecting every minute our cavalry, now hotly engaged close in our front, would open a way for our rifles at the enemy. But as we advanced the carbine firing receded, and ceased altogether at dark, when we went into camp about nine miles from Front Royal. The next morning, the 12th, we changed our line of march, moving off to the right toward Middletown, and going into camp at Cedar Creek, directly under Massanutten Mountain. On the 13th and 14th, the army was engaged in throwing up breastworks. On the 14th, our pickets advanced and drove the rebels back to Strausburg. We had a good view of the movement from the hill near our right. A signal station we had established on Three Top, the most westerly spur of Massanutten Mountain, was re-enforced. It had been seriously threatened during the day. Next morning, early, the signal station was attacked by the rebels and driven off. Our regiment and the 14th West Virginia were sent out, under Lieutenant Colonel Wildes, to re-establish it, but we found the enemy in too strong force to effect our object. We advanced, skirmishing with the enemy, nearly to the crest of the mountain, but there were met by a large body of rebel infantry, which checked our further progress. The rebels had established a signal station as soon as they drove our men off, and, while we were advancing up the mountain, we could see them signaling their camps below. While we were fighting near the top, the rebels advanced all along the line, and drove our pickets back to the position occupied by them before the advance of the day before. When the rebels advanced on the pickets, a strong body of infantry was sent out from their camps to cut us off. We saw the movement, from our elevated position, and fell back to the foot of the mountain. The officers of the signal corps with us signaled the movement on foot by the rebels to our army, when a force was sent out to intercept it. Upon discovering that we had been re-enforced, the rebel column fell back. We then advanced up the mountain a second time, and our picket line, being strengthened, advanced, and again drove the rebels back to

Strasburg. As we were nearing the top again, an order came directing us to fall back to the foot of the mountain, and remain there on picket during the night. That was an exciting night for pickets. Firing was kept up nearly all night. During the night, and again early next morning, brisk cannonading was heard in the direction of Front Royal. Our regiment, and the 14th West Virginia, were relieved from picket about 9 o'clock in the morning, and returned to camp.

But bad news now reached Sheridan, which caused him to make a hasty retreat. On the 16th Custer, Deven and Gibbs, of the cavalry, were confronted at Front Royal with Kershaw's division of infantry, which had taken part in the recent action near Malvern Hill. This explained the artillery firing we had heard the night before. A large force of cavalry also accompanied his division, besides Cutshaw's battalion of artillery. Reliable information showed that Early was now being re-inforced?? by General R. H. Anderson, commanding the First (Longstreet's) Corps, accompanied Kershaw's division of infantry, Fitzhugh Lee's division of cavalry, and Cutshaw's battalion of artillery. About the same time McCausland joined him with what was left of his two brigades of cavalry, after his terrible defeat, by Averill, at Moorefield, and also by some scattering commands from the Upper Valley. On the 14th, General Grant sent word to Sheridan that Lee had sent Early "two division of infantry, some cavalry, and twenty pieces of artillery," and he requested, "that Sheridan be warned to be cautious, and act on the defensive until movements here, (in the Army of the Potomac), force them to detach to send this way." Again, on the same day, Grant dispatched Sheridan: "The movements on the north side of the James to-day, developed the presence of Field's division of Longstreet's corps, which, I supposed, had gone to the Valley. Pickett's division is also here. * * * It is now positive that Kershaw's division has gone, but no other infantry." Sheridan was thus fully advised of the approaching re-enforcements?? by Grant himself, but his cavalry had also discovered their approach. Grant further said, in his dispatches to Sheridan. "This re-inforcement?? to Early, will put him nearer on an equality with you in numbers than I want to see, and will make it necessary for you to observe more caution about attacking." The position then occupied by Sheridan, at Cedar Creek, was a very bad one. It was entirely indefensible. Sheridan saw, and knew this, and so informed Grant as soon as possible after reaching it. And it will be observed, hereafter, that Sheridan never took but two positions, in the Valley, when he deemed it necessary to assume a safe one, viz: the position at Halltown, and the Clifton-Berryville line. On the night of the 15th, the 19th corps fell back to Winchester, and on the night of the 16th, the 6th corps, and ours, followed. On the morning of the 17th, we went into camp. Custer, Devin and Gibbs fell back before Kershaw's infantry; and Lee's cavalry, from Front Royal towards Winchester, following the infantry column, literally destroying, as they fell back, everything upon which man or beast could feed. A Richmond paper of the time said: "With their immense cavalry they extended their lines from Front Royal, in Warren County, to the North Mountains, west of Strasburg, and burnt every bushel of wheat, in stack, barn or mills, in Frederick, Warren, or Clark, as well as oats and hay, they have left absolutely nothing in these three counties. They drove before them every horse, cow, sheep, hog, calf and living animal from the country. What the people are to do, God only knows. General Early, two weeks ago, gave orders not to have a bushel of grain taken from below Strasburg, as hardly enough was left for the citizens."

On the 18th we changed our position, moving about five miles north of Berryville. On the 20th we moved to the vicinity of Clifton, now occupying the Clifton-Berryville line, the enemy closely following us. About 11 P.M., we fell back to the vicinity of Charlestown, the army now stretching from the Shenandoah to beyond Summit Point. We worked all that night throwing up breastworks, and the next day, about 8 A.M., Early came up with Rhodes' and Ramseuer's?? divisions, and attacked the left of the 6th corps and the right of ours, and fighting continued till dark. During the day, our brigade was sent across to the support of our right, and engaged the enemy, driving him from our front. The 6th corps advanced upon the enemy in its front, driving him back until it came upon his main line, falling back to its original position at dark. Had not Merritt at Berryville, and Wilson at Summit Point, checked Anderson, there would have been a general engagement that day, and probably a hard and doubtful battle fought. It was the purpose of Early and Anderson to have made a combined attack on Sheridan, but the efforts of Merritt and Wilson prevented Anderson joining Early from Winchester, where he had been lying since our retrograde from Cedar Creek. That night Sheridan withdrew Merritt and Wilson, and the army fell back, and took a position on Bolivar Heights at Halltown, its right resting on the Potomac, its left on the Shenandoah. A letter written from Halltown by Quartermaster Sergeant Walker, under date of August 30th, 1864, speaking of the movement of August 21st, says:

“SUNDAY, AUGUST 21ST. Without thinking what I was doing, or intending to do anything wrong, I read a *chapter* in my *Testament* this morning, but the boys said as it was my first offense, and if I promised to reform, they would let the matter drop. About 10 o'clock, the 123d Ohio were ordered out on a foraging expedition. Through some mistake, the whole brigade started, and were not halted till we had gone some distance, when were turned back, and camped in almost the same place we were in before. Before pitching tents, the men set to work cleaning up the camp, which being done, they were putting up their tents as neatly as they could, as though they expected to remain some time. They had not pitched more than half of them when we were ordered to move immediately. We had heard heavy cannonading for some time in our front, and there seemed to be a pretty severe fight going on. Crook's command, to which we belong, went to the extreme front, our regiment being in front of the brigade. After taking a position on the line, we went to work building breastworks of rails, logs and whatever else was convenient. After they were finished, Colonel Thoburn, commanding the division, rode by and spoke to one of the men asking him if they had 'got the works so they would turn rebel bullets,' and being answered in the affirmative, he said: 'Well, now, sit down and take it easy, *very easy*, for you may stay here three or four weeks.' Very cool, I thought, considering there was a greatly superior force in our front. At midnight, Sunday, we broke camp and fell back to Halltown, four miles from Harper's Ferry. Passing through Charlestown, our bands played 'John Brown's Body,' etc., much to the annoyance of the citizens of the place.”

In Walker's diary, under date of the 22d, I find the following singular entry: “Found our regiment in the extreme front. Got a canteen of whisky and sent out to the officers.” After a great deal of inquiry among the officers, I concluded that Walker was mistaken about this. Not an officer had the slightest recollection of such an event. So, thinking he might have some explanation he would wish to make, I wrote him regarding it, and received from him the following terse reply: “*That canteen of whisky was sent to you, if you must know.*” It will be seen that this proved a clear case of too much “cross-examination.”

The position of the army here was exceedingly strong, and we immediately set to work making it stronger, by building entrenchments. While our infantry now probably outnumbered that of the enemy, and was daily increasing by accessions from the sick, wounded and those exhausted and straggling from the Lynchburg raid, and the hard marches of July, their cavalry far outnumbered ours, and so roamed the country at will. To meet them in this respect, General Wilson's division of cavalry was brought over from the Army of the Potomac, which joined us at Winchester on the 17th. We had now with us such riders as Torbert, Merritt, Custer, Wilson, Devin, Averill, Powell, Lowell, Gibbs and Duffie, a grand host in themselves, and we heard no more of rebel cavalry raids in our rear. Harper's Ferry, our depot of supplies, was close behind us, and the army was kept daily well supplied.

This retrograde movement had been made for several reasons, but mainly because of the heavy reinforcements received by Early, and the instructions of Grant to “act on the defensive, until Lee was compelled to detach troops from Early to meet his necessities at Richmond.” But now Sheridan was watching every movement of the enemy to detect the very moment any of his troops were sent away. While Early's principal object seemed to be to keep the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad torn up, Sheridan's sole purpose was to destroy Early's army at the first opportunity. Hence active and heavy reconnaissance's were sent out from his entrenched position almost daily. A reconnaissance of our brigade on the 24th revealed a change in the enemy's position. We met with no loss. Major Morris, who had been at home since the 9th, on leave of absence on account of sickness in his family, returned to the regiment on the 26th, but in citizen's dress. His resignation had been tendered during his absence, and was a surprise to all. We were sorry to lose him from our numbers. Major Morris was an excellent officer, always prompt in the discharge of every duty, and as a man, was courteous and gentlemanly toward all, officers and men alike.

Cavalry fighting, with varied results, was continuous until the 26th, when, in the afternoon, our brigade was sent out on a reconnaissance in our front, and also to burn some grain and hay stacks, behind which the enemy were sheltered. The 116th had the advance on this occasion, and meeting the enemy's skirmishers soon after starting, it pressed them back to the cover of their artillery, capturing a number of prisoners. The reconnaissance demonstrated the presence of only General Anderson's force, and he did not return to the line from which he was driven, but fell back that night to Stephenson's Depot, where the cavalry found him next day, and where he was confronted by the advance of the 19th corps next day. On the day before, the 25th, Early, with the division of Rhodes, Ramseur, Gordon and Wharton, and most of his cavalry, moved

past our right to Shepherdstown, leaving Anderson in our front with only Kershaw's division and Cutshaw's artillery. Early attacked our cavalry, under Torbert, between Leetown and Kearneysville, and drove them off the field, nearly all of it returning to Halltown. Custer, however, being cut off, escaped through Shepherdstown. If it was Early's object to draw Sheridan out of his entrenchments, he failed, for all Sheridan did was to send his large body of cavalry across the river into Maryland, there to confront Early and to watch him if he made an attempt to cross into Maryland and Pennsylvania. Whatever Early's purpose was, the next day, the 26th, he marched back to Leetown, and the following day to Bunker Hill.

The loss of the 116th in the affair of the 26th, was as follows:

KILLED.

Private George W. Matchett, Company C.

DIED OF WOUNDS.

Corporal Jacob C. Sidders, Company I; Miles H. Davis, Company C.

WOUNDED.

Sergeant Major William J. Lee, side, slight; Corporal Jerome McVeigh, Company A, right hand, slight; Corporal J. C. Sidders, Company I, died; Private Elza J. Hill, Company A, right arm, slight; Private Emanuel Keylor, Company A, thigh, slight; Private John A. Harmon, Company A; Corporal Abner G. Carlton, Company C, thigh, severely; Miles H. Davis, Company C, died; Charles D. Watson, Company C, hip, slight; Sergeant A. G. Jackson, Company D, hip, slight; Sergeant James K. Drum, Company D, side, slight; Private Isaac Price, Company D, thigh, slight; Private William L. Morris, Company D, shoulder; Private James D. Ferrill, Company D, knee, slight; Private Charles Dirkus, Company E, knee, severely; Private Christian Miller, Company E, bowels, slight; Private Martin Thoner, Company E, knee, slight; Sergeant Leander Shaac, Company F, head, slight; Sergeant Mathias Rucker, Company F, foot, slight; Corporal Silas King, Company F, very severely; (the ball passed in at mouth and came out between the shoulders;) Private Amos S. Jones, and captured, died in Salisbury prison, March, 1865; Private L. Etaw, Company F, leg, slight; Sergeant Benjamin F. Sammons, Company H, hip, slight; Sergeant William A. Arnold, Company H, knee, severely; Private James R. Finley, Company I, leg, slight; Private Charles Watson, Company I, shoulder, slight; Private Jesse Burton, Company I, side, slight;

PRISONER.

Henry King, Company F.

Killed, 3; wounded, 25; prisoner, 1.

Colonel Wells says, in his report of this engagement: "The 116th Ohio and 5th New York were ordered to clear the woods, the 34th Massachusetts to charge across the open field and fire the stacks after the woods should be cleared. The 123d Ohio was held in reserve. The enemy's skirmishers were driven easily from the woods by our skirmish line. After our skirmishers were all in and were formed, Colonel Thoburn directed the skirmishers to charge through the woods. This we did, but as soon as our line entered it, we received a very heavy fire from a line of woods to our right across the pike. Entrenchments having been thrown up along the edge of these woods, and a strong line firing from these, within easy range, and directly upon our flank, made the small piece we were ordered to hold almost untenable. Our line quickly changed front to the right, and a portion of it charged across the pike, driving the enemy back from the edge of the woods occupied by them. I withdrew them as soon as possible, and formed in the edge of my own woods, parallel with and facing the pike. I sent two companies through to the part of the woods toward Charlestown, and then directed the 34th Massachusetts to move down to burn the stacks. This was soon

done. Meanwhile the line in the woods was exchanging fire across the pike with the enemy and losing men fast. After I saw the 34th moving back, I began to withdraw the line from the woods. Just as I was doing this, I received Colonel Thoburn's order to fall back. The 116th Ohio and 34th Massachusetts were steady and gallant as usual. The casualties were nine killed, fifty-six wounded and one missing." ---Colonel Wells' report, August 26th, 1864.

It will be seen that our loss of twenty-eight killed and wounded was a large share of the whole. It was the right wing of our regiment that drove the rebel skirmishers back from the edge of the woods by a charge across the pike, and it was in this charge we met our greatest loss.

From the appendix to George E. Pond's "Shenandoah Valley," I take the following extract from what purports to be an "Official Diary of First Corps Army Northern Virginia":

"August 26th. ----Enemy in position, and quiet until afternoon about five o'clock, when he advanced four or five regiments of infantry and one of cavalry to feel our lines. The picket line of the 15th South Carolina regiment, Kershaw's brigade, breaks, and one hundred men of it are captured. The enemy soon retires. During the night we hear of Early, who is at Leetown."

The 1st and 2d brigades of the 2d division attacked the rebel picket line farther to the left on the 26th, at the same time we moved out on the right. General Hayes was in command, and in his report he says: "On the 26th of August, my brigade, in connection with the 2d brigade, attacked the rebel picket line with decided success. My loss was three killed and twenty-one wounded. The loss of the enemy was 104 officers and men captured, and about 150 killed and wounded."

From a letter written August 27th, 1864, I extract the following: "We were in a fight yesterday in which our regiment lost one killed and twenty-six wounded. The 5th New York lost five killed and thirty-seven wounded. We took 103 prisoners, and drove the enemy from his position. This morning there is no enemy visible in our front. There is a movement of the rebels in some direction. The 19th corps is moving out towards Charlestown in pursuit. None of my officers were touched yesterday. The whole regiment behaved gallantly." The prisoners are evidently the same mentioned in General Hayes' report, and in General Anderson's memoranda. On the 28th, the army moved out to our old position of a week before, two miles beyond Charlestown, and then fell back to Charlestown. It must be borne in mind that we never passed through Charlestown without singing:

*"John Brown's body lies a moulding in the tomb,
His soul goes marching on."*

On the 1st of September, Corporal Sidders, of company I, thought to be killed in the reconnaissance at Halltown, on the 26th of August, turned up with a broken leg. He had suffered terribly with his broken limb, to which no care had been given, and afterwards died of his wound. Walker's record says of him: "Poor fellow! He was a brave soldier and a good boy, one that will be missed in the company and at home." Sergeant McKinzie, of company G, died in hospital at Sandy Hook, August 26th. These were two fine young soldiers and excellent men, and were a great loss to their companies and the service.

On the 3d of September, the army moved forward to the vicinity of Berryville, where our corps came upon the enemy. It had a very sharp fight. The 116th had four wounded, as follows: Privates Leonard Craig, company H, leg, severe; Benjamin Larrick, company H, hand, severe; John Harman, company A, nose, slight; George Bates, company I, hand, severe. Benjamin Larrick died of his wounds, October 2d, 1864, at Frederick, Maryland. We had gone into camp, and were cooking supper, when firing was heard on our picket line. Pans and kettles were dropped at once, and we moved up rapidly to the front, and took the position assigned us, where we lay down and sent out skirmishers. Some of our officers then went out to the front to see what was there, as there was no firing in our immediate vicinity. Suddenly a terrible fire opened on the regiments on our right and left, our brigade having been thrown into a gap existing between our second division and the 19th corps. The regiments fired upon stampeded in a panic, which, for the moment, also seized ours, and for the first and only time during its term of service, it fell back without

orders. It was rallied by the officers a few rods to the rear, however, when we all had a good laugh, at our own expense, over our "panic." The men were more ashamed of being caught in a "panic," than of any and all the little escapades of their lives, and never quite forgave themselves for it. However, no harm resulted, for the halt was so quickly made that the disaster which might have followed too far a retreat was averted. But we found ourselves alone now, far to the front without anything for some distance on our right or left, and the rest of the panic-stricken troops not coming back very promptly, we were ordered to fall back to a new line, forming behind a stone wall, some distance to the rear of our first position. Our men went back very reluctantly, for they wanted to wipe out, then and there, what they felt was a stain on their good name. Several of the officers wanted to charge anyhow, before falling back, and the men were as eager for it as they. With the officer who brought the order to fall back, was sent a request to Colonel Thoburn to "bring back the skedaddlers to this line and let us charge," but very soon a peremptory order came, and, reluctantly, the regiment retired to the position assigned it, and as events proved, we were none too soon in making the movement, for the rebels poured after us, close up to the stone wall, and occupied a stone house a short distance from our front. From this we soon dislodged them, taking possession of it ourselves, and we made good use of it in driving the line in the rear of it back a safe distance from our front. We lay in line of battle all that night, and the morning found the army entrenched and ready for what the day might bring forth.

The affair at Berryville was the result of pure accident. It was not brought on by intention on either side. A few days before this, Lee had recalled General Anderson, and the force that came with him to Early on the 16th of August at Fisher's Hill. Grant had been "hammering away" at Lee, and now his necessities compelled him to recall Anderson. Not knowing that an hour before we had moved across the Berryville pike, Anderson, on his way to pass through Ashby's Gap, and thence to Richmond, fairly stumbled upon our corps as some of it was going into camp. The impression given to our commanders was that Early was disputing the ground with us, and had met us there to give us battle, whereas our presence was not known to Early at all, until the head of Anderson's marching column blundered upon our camps. Had the actual situation been known to Sheridan, he could have destroyed Anderson, for Early, with the rest of his army, was several miles away. But it was a complete surprise to both sides, and so each fought shy of the other, and did more feeling and reconnoitering than fighting. Daylight seemed to shed no light on the affair of advantage to either side, and so, after bringing nearly all his force from Winchester to Anderson's assistance, and demonstrating a little towards our now well entrenched line, Early and Anderson both withdrew beyond the Opequan. We were again on the Clifton-Berryville line, and that morning our corps fell back to Clifton, where it went into camp. None of the men of the 116th will ever forget the "lecture" they received on the subject of "panics," and the office of the word "halt" in military matters.

From Walker's record, I take the following account of this affair at Berryville. "About 5 P.M., we moved forward once more, and went into camp on the right of the town. We had not got settled, when an order came to fall in immediately, which we did, and moved out by the right flank about half a mile and formed in line in the woods. Scarcely had we formed, when the enemy opened a severe fire on the left of our brigade, the 123d Ohio, and a regiment on our right, causing both to break and leave the field in some disorder. This left our regiment in danger of being flanked, and a portion began to fall back. The flanking was prevented by the whole regiment falling back to a large house and reforming, when they again went to the front, determined to stay. Lieutenant Colonel Wildes and Captain Teters displayed great gallantry, as indeed they always do. Those of us who had horses in charge fell back as the balls came whistling past us."

We now had a splendid army, and all felt that we could whip the enemy, and were impatient to be at it. Up to this time, from early in the spring, and, for that matter, from June the year before, we had had an almost uninterrupted series of reverses, owing to the undisputed fact that we had invariably been contending with vastly superior numbers.

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May 2, 2002
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