

CHAPTER XI.

An Ambulance Train Captured And Re-Captured-----
Action Taken By The Officers, On Hearing Of The
Death Of Captain Keyes-----Another Accident In The
Regiment-----Sheridan's Opportunity-----Getting Ready
For A Fight-----Battle of Opequan, September 19th
-----Another Gallant Charge-----List Of Casualties-----
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Charge.

Before entering upon what followed, we must record some further incidents of our regimental history. On the 5th of September, Moseby attacked and captured our ambulance train, which for some reason had been allowed to depart from Harper's Ferry without a guard. The train was in charge of Lieutenant Ransom Griffin, of the 116th, who had some time before been detached to the ambulance corps. Accompanying it were several officers returning to their commands, among whom was Lieutenant Colonel Kellogg, of the 123d Ohio. They were somewhat in advance of the train when Moseby made his attack upon it. Colonel Kellogg put spurs to his horse, and soon reaching a cavalry post, induced twenty men to follow him back, and attacking Moseby and his gang, they re-captured the train and brought it safely into camp. Colonel Kellogg's dashing act made him the hero of the hour. Next day Lieutenant Griffin made his appearance, not having been released by Colonel Kellogg's dashing act, but having made his escape during the night. It was reported of Lieutenant Griffin, that he charged the rebels with his "stretcher corps," and would have driven them off had all behaved as bravely as he did.

On the morning of the 8th, our corps was moved from the extreme left to the extreme right of the army. We were now not far from Smithfield, and only about five miles from Bunker Hill. The news of the fall of Atlanta was confirmed. Our Sutler came up for the first time since we started for Lynchburg in the spring. We heard to-day for the first time, of the death of Captain Keyes, at Lynchburg, Va., on the 19th of July. On the 10th, the officers met and adopted the following resolutions in respect to him:

"CAMP IN THE FIELD, SEPTEMBER , 10TH, 1864.

At a meeting of the officers of the 116th Regiment O. V. I., held in reference to the death of Captain Edwin Keyes, Captain Mallory was called to the Chair, and Lieutenant Wm. Bidenharn was appointed Secretary. The object of the meeting having been stated by Lieutenant Colonel Wildes, on motion, it was voted that a committee of three be appointed by the Chairman to draft resolutions for the occasion. The Chairman appointed Lieutenant Colonel Wildes, Captain W. B. Teters and Captain James P. Mann that committee, who reported the following:

WHEREAS, We hear with unfeigned sorrow and the deepest heart-felt regret, of the death of Captain Edwin Keyes, of Company B, 116th Regiment Ohio Infantry Volunteers, at Lynchburg, Va., July 19th, 1864, Therefore

Resolved, That in the death of Captain Keyes, we are deprived of the society of a fine Christian gentleman, a polished scholar, a brave and gallant officer, and the service and the country of a true, noble and earnest patriot.

Resolved, That in his loss we mourn another sacrifice on the altar of our common country; that the gallant charge in which he received his death wounds, while thus again brought terribly vivid to our minds, is made the more sacred to our memory, because of the precious lives that were there laid down.

Resolved, That we tender his bereaved wife, family and friends our warmest sympathy, and direct them to seek consolation in Him Who holds the destiny of nations in his hands, and Who only can support them under the weight of their great affliction.

Resolved, That a copy of these resolutions be sent to the family of the gallant dead, and to the Pomeroy Telegraph, Athens Messenger, Marietta Register, Spirit of Democracy and Noble County Republican.

On a motion of Lieutenant A. W. Williams, Quartermaster of the regiment, the resolutions were adopted after a few pertinent and feeling remarks from Lieutenant Colonel Wildes, reviewing the gallant conduct of the deceased.

THORNTON MALLORY, Chairman

WILLIAM BIDENHARN, Secretary

On the 10th of September, Corporal George K. Campbell, of B, who had been for some time on recruiting service in Ohio, was discharged from the 116th and promoted to a captaincy in the 174th Ohio Volunteers, Colonel John S. Jones, of Delaware, Ohio, commanding. Captain Campbell commanded company E in that regiment. Desiring to learn how he sustained the name and fame of his first love, I wrote General Jones and received a long letter in reply, in which he speaks in the most flattering terms of our Corporal. The 174th saw much fighting and severe service, being among the troops which beat off Hood from Murfreesboro in December, 1864, and afterwards was sent with the 20th corps, to Newbern, North Carolina, and joined General Sherman at Goldsboro, after fighting a hard battle at Kingston. The regiment, though a one year's organization, took part in five different engagements, in all of which it reflected credit upon Ohio soldiers. General Jones says of our Corporal: "Captain George K. Campbell was one of the most efficient officers in this gallant regiment. He was with it continually in every march and in every battle, and never omitted, or failed in, a single duty." That Captain Campbell should deserve and sustain, as he did, the character and reputation of one of the most worthy and efficient company commanders in such a regiment was what his old comrades of the 116th would expect of him, and was the fitting close of an honorable and gallant military record.

On the 13th, General McIntosh, of the cavalry, made a dash up the Berryville pike, and captured the whole of the 8th South Carolina regiment of infantry, numbering fourteen officers and ninety-two men. He captured two officers and thirty-five men besides, which, it was said, represented no less than six different Virginia mounted organizations. George E. Pond, Esq., in his "Shenandoah Valley in 1864," gives the number present, for duty, in Terry's brigade of

(Pages 168 and 169 of Wildes's book were apparently missed when this copy was made. This transcription will continue at page 170).

.....and fronting the enemy's left wing. Marching forward in two compact lines, we passed through the woods, to the right of the 19th corps' brigade. Our division was on the left in two lines, the second on the right, in the same formation, and the 116th in its accustomed place, on the left in the front line. Before our arrival on the field, the 6th and 19th corps had met with a reverse, the first and second lines having been driven back to the third before a check was given to the enemy. General Sheridan, getting his batteries into a position from which they were enabled to silence the enemy's guns, his lines again advanced, and retook the position from which they had been driven, and held it until the arrival of General Crook. "Then," as a historian remarks, "followed one of the most fiercely contested battles of the war." Large bodies of cavalry were forming to our right for a charge, as we were taking our position, and just as we moved forward, away the great mass went around the rebel left. As soon as the movement began, several bands struck up the liveliest and most soul stirring music. It was a very novel and thrilling scene.

Scarcely were our guns loaded, and our bayonets fixed, before the bugles sounded the charge, which was repeated by every officer in the two lines, and, with a loud cheer, our whole corps threw itself with desperate valor upon the enemy's left wing and flank. For thirty minutes the battle that ensued was perfectly terrific, but then the forces in our front gave way, and in an instant we were over their works, and after them with yells and shouts of victory. The enemy's line still remained intact to our left. All the way across in the charge, the 116th received an enfilading fire from it, which turned back its left to such an extent that when it reached the enemy's works, the left wing went over them almost by the flank. Changing

front now to the left, under fire, and without even stopping to adjust our line, or waiting for others to join us, we charged down upon the enemy's flank behind his works, and before he had time to change front to meet us, our bullets were whistling down his line, and we were upon him with the bayonet. We swept this line out from behind the works for a long distance, in fact, clear down to a stone wall which ran at right angles to this first line, a quarter of a mile from where we first charged on his flank. The 10th West Virginia regiment, from the second line, had been sent in on their flank just before we reached the rebel works, but we were only a moment behind it in its support. Driving the rebels out from their works in these woods, and seeing that they were again under good cover behind the stone wall in our front, we were ordered to halt, rest and re-form. Our own fire in front, and the fire of a brigade of the 19th corps, in which was the 116th New York, on their flank, soon drove them away from that part of the wall, but they still held it further to our right. While we lay here, it was with the greatest difficulty the men were restrained from making another charge, so eager were they to finish the work so well begun. As illustrating the ardor and enthusiasm of the men, Corporal Henry T. Johnson, of company H. who was a color bearer that day, did not, and would not halt when the command was given, but ran on several rods to the front, waving his colors, and calling back to the men to "come on." Lieutenant Colonel Wildes ordered him to return, but he would not come. Some of the color guard were then sent forward to bring him and the colors back to the regiment. They returned without him or the colors, but they brought the following message from the Corporal to the Lieutenant Colonel: "Tell Colonel Wildes to come on! We can finish this job just as well as not, and capture those d—d rebel flags." And, there he remained, holding his colors aloft, midway between the lines, until they were riddled with balls, and he was severely wounded. When we again received orders to move, we took the gallant wounded Corporal with us, he still clinging to his colors with one arm, the other being disabled. No one had the heart to punish him for disobedience of orders. Moving off to the right, we soon charged the rebel line again, driving it from the stone wall mentioned above. Again advancing, we formed in front of the enemy's inner and last line. In forming the new line, our regiment in the prolongation, was placed on a side hill, facing a rebel battery, which at once opened fire upon us. We were within very close range, and every discharge brought their missiles very close to our ranks. Word was sent to Colonel Wells, and permission asked to advance to the rise of ground, on the crest of which the rebel battery was planted, but before a reply could be returned, shells began to drop among us, and the regiment was ordered to advance to a place pointed out, directly under the guns, but protected from them by the formation of the ground. It ran down the hill, and up the next slope until near the top, when the men lay down and crawled along until they got sight of the battery, upon which they now opened a rapid fire, and very soon entirely silenced it, by shooting down some, and keeping the rest of the gunners from the guns. Here, again, the officers had difficulty in holding the men from charging the battery, which they had now silenced by their fire, and which seemed an easy prize. But we had already moved forward several rods without orders, and a second such move might bring down upon us the wrath of our brigade commander, especially should disaster follow our further advance. It is probable we should have charged the battery anyhow, had not Colonel Wells sent an aide up to reprimand us for moving forward without orders, and directing us to advance no further till ordered to do so. At this juncture, Custer came gallantly sweeping down the right, inside the enemy's works. Then it would have required more than orders to keep us from attempting to be the first to reach those guns, and away the regiment dashed in splendid style, the brave young aide joining us, and scaling the parapet, we flung our colors over the guns. Almost at the same instant, the whole of the infantry dashed forward on a furious charge, and the battle of Opequan was won, and, as Sheridan telegraphed to Washington that night, "the enemy was sent whirling through Winchester." Three thousand prisoners, fifteen battle flags, five pieces of artillery, two of those in the works we charged, were the trophies of the victory.

The loss of our army was about 5,000 killed and wounded, that of the rebels about 4,000. They abandoned their dead and wounded, leaving 3,000 of the latter in Winchester, and their dead on the field. The 116th lost six killed, and twenty-nine wounded, as follows:

KILLED.

Orville S. Hetzer, Company B; Lewis C. Secoy, Company B; Charles Schafer, Company E; Corporal Peter Yoho, Company F; John A. McElwee, Company H; George Sigler, Company K.

WOUNDED.

Corporal Jerome McVeigh, Company A, nick, slight; John Drake, Company A, foot, severe; John Hoy, Company A, thigh, severe; James H. Stewart, Company B, stomach, slight; Corporal D. F. Sears, Company C, head, severe; Emmon H. Beardmore, Company C, head, severe; Jacob Mishnack, Company C, thigh, severe; Wm. Montgomery, Company C, thigh, slight; W. W. Wheaton, Company C, groin, slight; Second Lieutenant W. H. Moseley, Company H, thigh, severe; Corporal Henry T. Johnson, color bearer, arm, severe; Mathew R. Moore, Company H, leg, severe; John W. Williams, Company H, leg, severe; Isaiah Tribby, Company H, shoulder, severe; Yoho Watson, Company H, head, severe; Israel L. Hamilton, Company D, leg, severe; Peter Beaver, Company D, thigh, severe; Sergeant Mathew Atkinson, Company E, leg, severe; Milton Mozena, Company E, head, severe; Dallas Gillmore, Company E, side, severe; Corporal Lewis W. Mozena, Company E, arm, severe; I. Phelps, Company F, groin, severe; Joshua Mercer, Company F, ankle, severe; Samuel R. Halliday, Company G, leg, severe; J. H. Harman, Company G, finger; John J. Norris, Company I, foot, severe; William McNeil, Company K, arm, severe; Daniel D. Weddle, Company K, knee, severe.

All of these were severely wounded, except four, namely Jerome McVeigh, James H. Stewart, Wm. Montgomery, and W. W. Wheaton. Lieutenant Moseley was made a cripple for life, from a very severe wound received in the thigh. He was a most excellent officer in every sense. His genial, good natured disposition made him friends of all who met him, and he was greatly missed ever afterwards by us all. The loss of the 116th would have been very much larger in the first charge, owing to the enfilading fire of the enemy, but for a rail fence on our left, and for the relief given us by the gallant 10th West Virginia. Some of our officers, who went over the field after the battle, to bury the dead and care for the wounded, reported that fence “a paying lead mine.” That night we went into camp on the spot near Winchester, upon which we had camped twice before since starting out in the spring.

This battle was a very important one to the Union cause. The President ordered 100 guns to be fired by all the Union armies, in honor of Sheridan and his victorious troops. The feeling of rejoicing among our men, especially in Crook’s corps, was almost beyond bounds. It was our first solid victory since the battle of Piedmont, though in that time we had fought seven or eight battles. Early said in his report: “As soon as the firing was heard in rear of our left flank, the infantry commenced falling back along the whole line.” President Lincoln telegraphed Sheridan:

*Have just heard of your great victory. God bless you all, officers and men.
Strongly inclined to come up and see you.*

A. LINCOLN.

The day after the battle, President Lincoln gave to Sheridan the merited appointment of Brigadier General in the regular army.

Colonel Wells says, in his report of the battle of Opequan: “As Colonel Duval’s division arrived on our right, we were ordered to charge. This order came so suddenly that I had only time to leave word for the 34th Massachusetts to follow, leap the fence, and go on with the three regiments forming the front line. As we charged through the oblong field, we met a severe enfilading fire from the woods on the left. I asked Colonel Wildes to change front with his regiment, 116th Ohio, and clear the woods. The men were going forward with such enthusiasm, however, that it seemed impossible to make them understand, and I pointed out the danger to the commander of a regiment of the second line, the 10th West Virginia, following close behind. He immediately changed direction, came upon our left, and was soon hotly engaged in the woods. Colonel Wildes also succeeded in turning his regiment under fire, and went to the support of the 10th. Leaving this issue behind us, the balance of my command, strongly re-enforced by a portion of the 3d brigade, passed the woods on our left, and came into the plain. Here I saw that the enemy, driven from his first position, was forming behind a high stone wall which ran across the field at right angles with that of

our advancing line. His right was about 1,000 yards from the wood, his left extending toward the Martinsburg pike. Along this line artillery was posted, and in the rear of it, upon a knoll, was an earthwork, with rifle-pits in which were two guns. About 400 yards in front of this line, and parallel with it, was a low stone wall. I immediately threw my men, now thoroughly exhausted by their long run, behind this wall. Soon after, Colonel Wildes came out of the woods, and formed on our left. Here the battle hung, it seemed to me, for hours. The artillery was playing upon our lines from three different directions, one battery being not more than 500 yards distant. The rebels had the advantage in numbers, position and cover, and their fire seemed to increase in intensity every minute. The right flank was, however, wholly exposed, and I was looking every moment for the 6th corps to make its appearance there, and held on. Colonel Thoburn came along the line, and informed me this movement was about to be made, and that General Crook desired our forces to charge, the moment the flanking force should appear. While he was speaking, the 34th Massachusetts, on the right impatient at their constant and increasing loss, sprang to their feet, and started for the rebel battery alone. Almost the same moment, the long looked for movement was made, and our whole line went forward with a cheer, and the rebels were driven from the wall in utter rout. The battery in the earth-work still remained, and enough of the enemy with it to give us a heavy fire as we advanced to the wall recently held by the enemy. Halting here for a while, I was again ordered forward, and moved the brigade down into the hollow, and within 300 yards of the battery. The 116th Ohio had an excellent position on the left, from which they were enabled to fire directly upon the pieces and horses. We hung here again for some time, the 19th corps forming a line behind the stone wall in our rear, and the 6th corps at some distance to the left. Finally Custer's cavalry made a dashing charge upon the right, sweeping around, almost into the earth-works. Now the whole line went forward again, and the battle was, to all intents and purposes, at an end. * * * Major Pratt, commanding the 34th Massachusetts, and Lieutenant Colonel Wildes, commanding the 116th Ohio, handled their regiments with great courage and skill, and in all the confusion of the charges, kept their commands together and in good order." ---Colonel Wells' report, September 20th, 1864.

The 19th corps had suffered terribly up to 3 o'clock. On the right, especially, their loss was fearful. As we passed their right to our position, our regiment came upon the 116th New York. There was a mutual recognition of the regiments on the flags, and some of the officers of the two regiments shook hands. "God bless you! How we have watched for your coming. We'll watch our old number go in, and may victory crown it," said one of its officers, as we passed by.

Major J. W. DeForest, of the 12th Connecticut, whose regiment belonged to the 19th corps, and which lay close by where our division made its charge, gives a very graphic account of it in Harper's Monthly Magazine for January, 1865. I quote from his article as follows: "At 3 o'clock the hour of defeat for Early had come. To our right, where, precisely, I could not see, because of the rolling nature of the ground, but in the direction of the spot where our 1st brigade was forming, those prostrate and bloody ranks which I have mentioned, we heard a mighty battle yell, which never ceased for ten minutes, telling us that Crook and his men were advancing. To meet the yell, there arose from the farthest sweep of the isolated wood, where it rounded away to the rebel rear, the most terrific, continuous wail of musketry that I ever heard. It was not a volley, nor a succession of volleys, but an uninterrupted explosion, without a single break or tremor. As I listened, I despaired of the success of the attack, for it did not seem to me possible that any troops could endure such a fire. The Captain of our right company, who was so placed that he could see the advance, afterwards described it to me as magnificent in its steadiness, the division which accomplished it, moving across the open fields in a single line, without visible supports, in spite of the stream of dead and wounded which dropped to the rear, the pace being ordinary quick-step, and the men firing at will, but rarely." Speaking of the last charge made by us upon the position occupied by the rebels in and around the fort, or earth-work, containing the two guns we captured, the same writer says: "At the distance of half a mile from us, too far away to distinguish the heroism of individuals, but near enough to observe all the grand movements and results, the last scene of the victorious drama was acted out. Crook's column carried the heights and the fort which crowned them. We could see the long, dark line moving up the stony slopes; we could see the smoke and hear the clatter of musketry on the deadly summit; then we could hear our comrades' cheer of victory."

General Crook, in his report of the battle of Opequan, says: "I was instructed by General Sheridan to place my command on the right and rear of the 19th corps, and to look out for my right, as the enemy was

reported to be moving in that direction. I directed Colonel Joseph Thoburn, commanding 1st division, to take post nearly on the prolongation of the 19th corps, which was opposite the extreme left of the enemy. Colonel J. H. Duvall, commanding the 2d division, was posted still further to the right, for the purpose of swinging round the left flank of the enemy. Colonel Duvall's right, in thus swinging round, came in sight of the enemy's skirmishers, and finally a portion of the main body of General Torbert's cavalry came sweeping down on the enemy, and protecting my right flank. Just before Colonel Duvall's division got fairly around, Colonel Thoburn's division made a charge, driving the enemy's right back in confusion to their final position. Colonel Duvall, after getting squarely around, charged the enemy in flank, and found him strongly posted behind a stone wall, with his left flank resting on an almost impassable morass named Red Bud Run, which it was necessary for him to cross. The rough and uneven ground, the tangled thickets on the banks of this slough, and the great difficulty experienced by the men in crossing, as it was very deep and miry, broke the lines completely, and mingled the men of the different regiments and brigades into one throng. Without halting to form, after having crossed, the officers and men of the 2d division united with those of the 1st, which had now closed in, sending many prisoners to the rear, and the whole command, cheering as it went, rushed on, heedless of the destructive fire of shot and shell, canister and musketry that thinned their ranks, and which would have driven back in disorder troops less determined, all seemingly intent on one grand object, the total rout of the enemy. In this they were successful, as the enemy gave way in great confusion before their determined assaults, and but for the morass impeding their progress, the 2d division would have captured many more prisoners in this charge. The enemy left two pieces of artillery in our hands when he fled, being so closely pressed that he could not take them off."---*General Crook's report, October 17th, 1864.*

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