

WAR STORIES.

From Mechanicsville to Malvern Hill.

S. M. Truitt, in Atlanta Journal.

The company in which I served during the four years' war between the North and the South was organized and enlisted in Webster, Jackson County, North Carolina, on the 13th day of April, 1861, and practiced drilling from that day till the 27th day of the same month. The State of North Carolina had not yet seceded, and in the meantime President Lincoln had called for 75,000 volunteers with which it was said to put down the rebellion in 30 days. North Carolina was expected by Mr. Lincoln to furnish her quota of the volunteers called for. At that time the excitement was very great, and instead of enlisting to serve in President Lincoln's cause the young men and a great many men who had wives and children to love and to care for all over the State from the very richest to the very poorest, abandoned their planted crops or quit their places of business and enlisted and organized companies and bid adieu to their fathers and mothers, and sisters and dear wives and children, and hastened to Raleigh and organized into regiments for the Southern cause. From Raleigh they hastened to the seat of war in Virginia or to the coast of North Carolina. My company was Company A, of the Sixteenth North Carolina regiment of volunteers, composed of 13 companies and containing 1,357 men, mostly from the mountain counties west of the Blue Ridge. Stephen Lee, a graduate of West Point and an old school teacher of Asheville, was elected colonel of the regiment. He was a brave, refined and noble Christian gentleman, but on account of his old age and feebleness he had to resign and leave us in January or February, 1862. In the month of June, 1861, the Sixteenth regiment went from Raleigh to Richmond, and in July from Richmond to Stanton, and from Stanton to West Virginia, and on the third day of August, after a long and wearisome march, we pitched our tents on the top of Valley Mountain and Valley Gap. It rained a great deal while we were camped there and the regiment lost many men from measles and typhoid fever. Late in November of 1861, under General Lee, we were marched down Valley River to attack the Federals commanded by General Rosenorans. We had our first skirmish with them and drove their pickets in. There I heard the first cannon roar and the cannon balls whistle over our heads that I had ever heard. They were too well fortified across the narrow valley to be routed by our army and we had to fall back to Valley Mountain. During this time the Sixteenth was attached to General Gillam's brigade. In the last of November we had to evacuate the mountain and waded many swollen streams back to Stanton and from Stanton we went to Manassas, and remained there a few weeks and built some fortifications which we abandoned in January and went to Occoquan Bay for a short time, and from there to Fredericksburg. At this place in February, 1862, General Joseph E. Johnston and President Davis reviewed the Confederate army of more than 100,000 soldiers, which I believe was the grandest army and the best fighters that ever fought battles on this continent. Then the army marched to Yorktown and early in the spring we had to evacuate Yorktown and fall back to Richmond, being followed by the Federal army. My regiment was at that time in the brigade with Hampton's legion and the Nineteenth Georgia regiment. The brigade was commanded by General Wade Hampton. Just after my regiment had passed by the fortifications below Williamsburg, the Federals rushed up behind on abandoned fortifications and attacked the rear of our army after they had passed the fortifications and were passing through Williamsburg. My regiment had passed through the town on the road to Richmond, and stopped and stacked their arms and were toasting cold corn bread and broiling bacon over the camp fires preparing to take a much needed lunch. But suddenly we heard musketry mingled with the roar of artillery, the regiment was formed into line of battle immediately and stood in sight of the battle in readiness to help if needed. But we saw the rear of our army which had been attacked drive the Federals back in short order and then continue their march towards Richmond. We camped a few miles below Richmond for a few days. When one day suddenly the drum was tapped and the long roll was sounded. We fell into ranks and made a hurried march of a few miles to where the battle of Seven Pines was raging. The brigade, composed of Hampton's legion, the Sixteenth North Carolina regiment and the Nineteenth Georgia, rushed into the raging and roaring battle.

Carolina, charged through an open field under heavy fire of musketry and artillery to the edge of a marshy swamp. Just beyond the swamp and about 100 yards in front of us were the Federal fortified lines of infantry and artillery playing upon us and we could not charge them on account of the miry swamp which lay between the two opposing lines of battle. Under this disadvantage we fought them behind their fortifications for about three hours, when the darkness of night came upon us and we were quietly withdrawn from that battlefield which was the first great battle in which my regiment up to that time had an opportunity to be engaged in. The regiment lost many of our brave men killed and wounded, among whom was our brave commander, Colonel Davis, killed. General Joseph E. Johnston at that time was commander in chief of the army in Virginia and was wounded in that battle and while he was wounded General Robert E. Lee was given command of the army and was commander in chief of our army till the war ended.

This battle of Seven Pines was fought the 31st day of May, 1862. After that time we remained in camp in rear of our line of breastworks along the southern banks of the Chickahominy River, which was fronting General McClelland's fortifications along the northern bank of the Chickahominy, till the evening of June 25th, when the Yankees gave us a shower of shells and a very close call for a squad of a half dozen of the boys of my company, who were playing cards at the foot of a large pine tree when the shelling began. The shells came thick and fast and were cutting off the limbs of the trees. Just then the boys who were playing cards became more interested in the exploding shells and quit playing and left the deck of cards on the blanket where they had played for hours. In a minute after they had quit playing and had separated a shell came along and out of the branch of a tree, then buried itself about six feet in the ground, exactly under that blanket, then exploded and blew up the blanket and left a hole in the ground where the blanket had been lying. The regiment and brigade were immediately ordered into line and marched that evening and until night a few miles up the Chickahominy, to the left of where we had been stationed, and stopped in a dense woodland during that night and the next day, which was the 26th of June, till 12 or 1 o'clock. My regiment in General Pender's brigade and with General A. P. Hill's division were quietly marched out of the woods into the road a few hundred yards this side of the bridge over the Chickahominy River. We drove the Yankee pickets away from the bridge and crossed over the river and marched up that road along by the side of a little branch till we passed the spring and to the top of a low hill in the middle of a field and in plain view of the enemy's line of fortifications, which were about four hundred yards in front of us. Our brigade was quickly formed into line of battle across that field under heavy fire of musketry and artillery. We charged across the field to within about seventy-five yards of the enemy's fortified line, when again we found a little miry swamp lying between our line and the Yankee line which we could not charge over. When we could advance no further an order passed along our lines to lie down, which we did, and loaded and fired at them till the darkness of night came upon us. There I had my first close call and a hint to the wise. My left hand comrade, who was an old schoolmate of mine, would not lie down. In an instant several of the boys saw him alone, standing and offering himself as a target, and yelled at him to "lie down or you will be killed." I turned on my side and looked up and said to him: "Lie down or you will be killed." At that moment a ball pierced him through the heart. I was looking in his face when the ball struck him. For a moment or two he stood erect as though he was on a balance and as if nothing had happened to him, then suddenly, with a beautiful natural smile on his face, he lost his balance and fell on his back dead. Soon after dark had hovered over that battlefield and all became quiet along the line my regiment was moved along the line to the right into a woodland and rested on our arms till daylight next morning, the 27th day of June. We expected the battle to open and continue that day on the same field, but to my surprise when morning came all was quiet along the Yankee line, except a few stray picket shots. During the night and the early morning the enemy had quietly evacuated their fortifications

and were retreating. The killed and wounded of my regiment in that day's battle were many and greatly lamented. Soon after the break of day we moved further to the right into an open field close in front of the Yankee breastworks. All over this field were many dead and wounded of an Alabama brigade. We then advanced in line of battle and went over their abandoned line of fortifications. They had heard that Stonewall Jackson was coming in their rear and they hastened to retreat and dodge him. We soon formed into line of march and pursued them through their evacuated burning camps. About 2 o'clock that day my regiment and brigade were formed into line of battle at the place that soon became the battlefield of Gaines' Mill. My company was deployed and sent in front of the regiment as skirmishers.

We had not advanced very far when we met a solid line of bluecoats, advancing and supported by another solid line a short distance in the rear of the first line. My company fired into them and fell back. They did not return the fire at us then. We fell back before them out of one field and through a woodland and into another field, and in the middle of this field we met and passed through the rear of a solid line of our men advancing to meet them in the middle of that field. Just as my company, as a retreating line of skirmishers, passed through to the rear of this solid advancing line the rebel warwhoop mingled with a mighty volley of musketry was sounded all along the line and at the same instant the Yankees returned a solid volley into our ranks. We went a little distance to the left to where we had been sent away from the regiment as skirmishers and found the regiment in a mighty shower of balls. We took our place in line with the regiment which was then starting to charge. The fight was now getting lively and in earnest. This time we had no breastworks to charge, with a swamp in our way.

But the two largest and best opposing armies that ever met on this continent met face to face and fought this battle of Gaines' Mill, fairly and squarely. Our first volley with a mighty rush forward drove them back across the field till we came in close contact with their batteries and lines of fresh troops. The battle was waged for hours stubbornly by both armies. We would charge them off the field and several times they came back at us again and again and disputed our possession of the field. The battle lasted till in the night. And just after the darkness of night had come upon us we made a last farewell good night charge and drove them back more than a mile and held the battle field.

We got the best of that fight, for I honestly believe that there were two dead or wounded Federals to every dead or wounded Confederate, and we held the field undisputed after that charge. That night and the next day till late in the afternoon we remained on that battle field and enjoyed a much-needed rest. Then we fell into line of march and marched all night. The next morning about 8 o'clock we stopped and hurriedly enjoyed a breakfast of Yankee crackers and bacon which we had captured during the previous day. I had some genuine Yankee coffee and I asked my captain and lieutenant to drink coffee with me. They accepted the invitation and while we sat on the ground and ate hard tack and enjoyed the drinking of coffee we talked of the dead and wounded and their great suffering. In the midst of our conversation I remarked that it was hard to suffer as many of the wounded suffer and then die. But I would prefer being mortally wounded and have some time in

which to investigate myself and prepare to cross over the river of life.

My captain (his name was Andrew W. Coleman) replied to me that if I should be mortally wounded so as to cause my death during the war, instead of such suffering I prefer that my head be shot off right around here (at the same time drawing his right hand under his chin, showing what he meant.) We then continued our march till about noon of that day. We heard heavy firing in our distant front. We continued our march till we came in range of the enemy's stray cannon balls and shells. Then our brigade, commanded by General Pender, was filed out and closed in mass on the right of the road to wait for orders.

The battle was raging in front of us and the stray shells made it very unpleasant for us. In a few minutes the command was given orders to fall into ranks, which we did in closed mass. The time had come to measure arms with the Yanks again on the battlefield of Frasier's farm. Just then while we were standing waiting for commanding orders to go forward, I got my second close call. I was standing with my left arm against my captain's right arm when a stray Yankee shell struck the ground about fifteen yards in front of Captain Coleman and ricocheted and out his head off just under his chin—just as he had said to me that morning that he would prefer to have it instead of being mortally wounded. I did not know anything had happened. Suddenly, as though I had been dead or asleep, about two minutes after the occurrence I came to life or awoke from sleep as the case may have been, and was lying on my back on a litter. My face was smarting and felt wet. I drew my hands over my face and filled both with his brains and powdered skull. I said to the litter bearer, "Hold on, boys, let me examine myself and see if I am hurt." I then sprang on my feet and found myself to be unhurt. The first thing I beheld was Captain Coleman, lying at full length with all of his head shot off.

He fell forward. The shell had exploded just after it struck his head and the pieces of that shell killed and wounded four or five men in the other regiment in our rear. I wiped his brains and blood out of my face and off of the breast of my coat and vest. The brigade then formed into line of battle, and went forward a short distance into a cedar thicket and passed through a Virginia brigade that was stubbornly falling back and fighting. As soon as we passed through this line the Virginians ceased firing. Then Pender's brigade rushed forward and gave the Rebel yell and turned a volley of musket balls loose at them and drove them out of the woods into a little field and they had an enfilading fire on us which made it the hottest place that I had ever been in. At the edge of the woods beyond the field was a battery that had made it unpleasant for us when my captain was killed. Just as dark was approaching we charged across that field through a storm of grape shot and minie balls and captured that battery and shot down many horses which were being brought up to move the caissons and guns out of danger of being captured. This battle closed soon after the darkness of night had come upon us.

During that night my regiment and brigade remained on the same line from which we had driven the enemy

and had taken their battery and were holding it. A short time after the battle had ended and all was quiet along the line and the night was very dark, a commanding officer wound his way through the bushes till he was within a few steps of our line and in front of us he halted and mistook our line of men to be the line of Yankees who had supported that captured battery under his command. An he gave the command, "Hold your position, my brave men, at all hazards." Our boys said to him: "Who are you?" He answered: "United States Major General Me—" Some of our boys told him he must surrender and he said he would not surrender, and turned to ride off. Then several of the boys fired in the darkness at him—then he lit off of his horse and said he would surrender. He was sent to the rear and his horse was confiscated for the Confederacy. Thus ended the career of my regiment in the battle of Frasier's farm, and my company came out of that battle without a commissioned officer to command them. Our captain had been killed and the lieutenants were wounded.

During that night the enemy fell back to Malvern Hill, and were formed into line of battle and massed their great number of cannons in a strong position on a ridge with a field in front of this great mass of artillery supported by General McClelland's whole army of infantry and waited for General Lee and Stonewall Jackson's forces to attack them. Late in the evening of that day, which was the first day of July, our army attacked them by charging through that field facing a hundred or more than a hundred firing cannons. Such a roar of artillery I had never before heard and it was nearly all from the Yankee cannons, as our infantry was charging and our artillery could not be brought to bear upon their line. The battle raged till long after night.

They could not be routed from this strong position, but our army wore themselves out trying in the face of this mighty mass of belching cannons, and finally ceased charging and fell back a little distance. By the next morning McClelland had abandoned this naturally strong position, and took refuge under the range of his gunboats.

Pender's brigade was not engaged in the charge in this great battle, but was held in reserve and in support of the charging line and was thus exposed to the raining shower of shells and minie balls.

This series of great battles began at Mechanicsville and ended thirty miles away at Malvern Hill and seemed to be enough to end that strife, but it was only the beginning with those two opposing American armies.

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