

Battle of Fair Oaks—Services of the First Long-Island Regiment.

To the Editor of the New-York Times :

In the concluding article on the Peninsular Campaign of Gen. McCLELLAN, written by the Prince DE JOINVILLE, and published in the *Herald* of the 19th November, there will be found in the fifth paragraph the following sentence :

"About a mile of ground has been lost, fifteen pieces of cannon, the camp of the division of the advanced guard, that of Gen. CASEY; but now we hold our own. A sort of line of battle is formed across the woods, perpendicularly to the road and the railroad, and there the repeated assaults of the enemy's masses are resisted. The left cannot be turned, where is the White Oak Swamp, an impassable morass; but the right may be surrounded. At this very moment, in fact, a strong column of Confederates has been directed against that side. If it succeeds in interposing between Bottom Bridge and the Federal troops, which hold beyond Savage's Station, the entire left wing is lost. It will have no retreat, and is doomed to yield to numbers; but precisely at this moment—that is to say, at six o'clock in the evening—new actors appear on the scene. Gen. SUMNER, who has succeeded in passing the Chickahominy, with SEDGWICK'S Division, over the bridge constructed by his troops, and who, like a brave soldier, has marched straight through the woods to the sound of the cannon, arrived suddenly on the left flank of the column with which the enemy is endeavoring to cut off HEINTZELMAN and KEYES."

The part borne by the First Long Island Regiment, which I had the honor to command in this battle, was not an insignificant one. The official reports of Maj.-Gen. KEYES, who commanded the Army Corps, and who in person posted the regiment, and Gens. KEARNY and NAGLEE, make honorable mention of the regiment, as I am told, but I have never seen the reports myself. My own report of the battle was made, as is usual, to the General commanding the brigade, who was doubtless well occupied elsewhere, for I neither saw him during the engagement, nor for some hours previously, nor until several days afterward. I have long wished an opportunity to render merited justice to the brave men who stood by me on that day, and the statement of the Prince DE JOINVILLE, quoted above, happily furnishes the text upon which I may publicly claim for them a consideration to which their services on that day entitle them.

The Brigade to which the regiment belonged was posted on the right of the left wing, which extended, as stated by DE JOINVILLE, from Fair Oaks Station on the York Railroad, south to the White Oak Swamp. The post of the regiment was near Seven Pines, on the nine mile road, which ran northerly to Fair Oaks, from which it was separated by a swamp; the remainder of the Brigade (with the exception of two regiments, which early in the action had been posted in advance of this swamp and supporting CASEY'S right) was posted near, and in the rear of Fair Oaks Station, and was under the immediate command of the Brigadier-General of the Brigade.

When CASEY'S Division, which was some half mile in our front, was driven in, which took place within an hour and a half of the opening of the battle, the two regiments of our brigade, spoken of as posted in front of the swamp, were utterly overwhelmed, and did not appear again as regiments on that day. The swamp proved less impassable than was previously supposed and the enemy profiting by the cover afforded, had ample opportunity to form there in great force, and advance on the right of our regiment, which was the only regiment in line of battle at that point, and separated, as already stated, by the swamp from the remainder of the brigade, who were thus effectually prevented from cooperating with us in resisting their advance. Had the First Long Island Regiment given way at this time, the left wing of the Army of the Potomac would have been turned, and the magnitude of such a result may be estimated by the evidence furnished above by the Prince DE JOINVILLE. It would have proved the destruction of the entire army.

The regiment held this position without wavering. A storm of shot and shell, from the batteries which had demolished CASEY'S Division, in their front, and a terrific fire from an overwhelming force posted under cover on their right, within pistol-shot distance, was enough to test the nerves of old veterans. Well might Gen. KEARNY characterize them as "a noble regiment." From the dead it was subsequently ascertained that the force opposed to us was the Twenty-sixth and Twenty-second North Carolina, the Twenty-fourth and Forty-second Virginia, the Fifth, Seventh, and Fourteenth Tennessee, the Eighth and Thirty-fifth Georgia, the Sixth South Carolina, and the Hampden Legion.

The regiment had now been under fire for five hours. Had seen the debris of four entire regiments seek shelter in their rear—not to mention the stream of humanity from Casey's routed division, which sifted through their line like water—an overwhelming force pressing and gradually extending on their unprotected right, the gaps opened by the lead and iron hail, as it tore through their ranks, growing fearfully wider and more frequent, and having a third of their number killed and wounded; yet they waited the order to retire. Riding out of the line and to the left, I perceived that the battery which we were supporting had retired from its position, and I accordingly ordered a retreat—not a moment too soon, for the enemy, far outnumbering us, was even then in our midst.

It was now past 6 P. M., when, according to the statement of the Prince DE JOINVILLE, SUMNER'S column had arrived at Fair Oaks, to check the, till then, victorious enemy. The purpose had been served, and the regiment was withdrawn without pursuit by the enemy, to the line of defenses in our rear.

I do not hesitate to declare, that to the firmness and gallantry of the First Long Island Regiment, is due the preservation of the Army of the Potomac on that day. Not that they fought better than others. I dare say the rest of the division did their duty equally well in their positions, but it was a good fortune to occupy the key-point of the battle, and to hold it against fearful odds, until the tide was turned by the arrival of reinforcements.

In corroboration I will state that no less than six general officers, old soldiers all, and not political appointees, were grouped with us at frequent intervals during the battle; several without command aided me in encouraging the men, and remained with me until the last. Two were wounded beside me, and their horses killed, and the Major-Gen. KEYES, commanding the Army Corps, in the hottest of the fire, addressed the men of the regiment individually, and encouraged them by praising their good conduct, and promising them speedy reinforcements. The continued presence of these general officers at this point, (one of whom was the lamented KEARNY,) indicate pretty clearly the importance of the position. I mention this in justice to the men of the First Long Island Volunteers, whose indomitable bravery and firmness on that occasion has not been exceeded, if equaled, by that of any regiment during the war.

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