HOOKER'S DIVISION AT SEVEN PINES.

AFTER the battle of Williamsburg, as we slowly advanced up the Peninsula, we found everywhere evidence of the toilsome retreat of the Confederate army in the shape of broken-down wagons and abandoned material. The roads, which had been literally transformed into muddy ditches by the passage of their artillery and trains, were well-nigh impassable. General McClellan mentions in a dispatch to the Secretary of War, May 17, that the trains of two of his divisions which left Cumberland upon the 16th for White House, a distance of five miles, had, at the end of twenty-four hours, traversed less than half the distance, and that it was impossible to make a movement of troops upon that day. For the remainder of the month it stormed incessantly. I find notes in my army letters of having been frequently drowned out of our bivouacs.

The 26th of May saw our division covering the left of the Army of the Potomac in their exposed position on the west bank of the Chickahominy, and guarding the line of the White Oak Swamp from Bottom's Bridge to Brackett's Ford.

Our two regiments, the Fifth and Sixth New Jersey, were encamped upon a rise on Turner's farm, about five miles in a direct line from Seven Pines, but probably a mile farther by the road, *via* Savage's Station.

At 3 P.M. upon the 31st of May we had orders to march towards the sound of battle, upon General Casey's front. We had not advanced far in the direction of Savage's Station before we began to meet the routed troops from the front; they were rushing madly to the rear, as thoroughly disorganized and demoralized a mass as it has ever been my lot to encounter.

I was with a similar advance of our division, under General Berry, of Maine, to restore our right flank at Chancellorsville, and there met the Eleventh Corps in their wild stampede before Jackson, which was bad enough, but nothing to this,—a panic-stricken mass of defeated troops, mixed with gaunt, wild-eyed, wounded men; a complete mixture of different regiments, hatless, coatless, battle-begrimed, mud-stained, and bleeding, filled the road and adjoining fields, and made it difficult for us to advance and maintain our regimental organization.

Against and through this mass our troops resolutely pressed forward, passed Savage's Station, and reached the line of battle just as darkness began to close in upon the scene, but too late to be able to take a hand.

Referring to the delay in bringing up the seven regiments of our division, General Heintzelman says, in his report, the road was filled with fugitives as far as Bottom's Bridge; Colonel Starr's regiment, of Hooker's division, had to force the way through them with the bayonet. General Hooker says Colonel Starr's regiment led the column, and the road was heavy, but offered no serious difficulty to our advance until our column reached the Burned Chimneys, about two miles from our camp, where we first encountered the throng of fugitives from the battle-field, which greatly delayed us from that point onward.

Colonel Starr reports the road and fields upon both sides were thronged with flying regiments from the battle-field, two or three miles in front, through whose routed and disorderly masses he was obliged to force his way with bayonet and sabre.

The battle of Seven Pines was certainly a great failure of a well-laid plan upon the part of the Confederate forces to crush our left wing; they were greatly favored by their position, as their lines completely enveloped General Casey's devoted division, upon his front on the Williamsburg road; they were almost in contact, while they encircled his flanks within a distance of one and a half miles from his head-quarters. The elements also favored them, for the month of May had been one of unprecedented rains, and the storm of May 30, 1862, will long be remembered for its severity.

General Keyes, in his report of the battle, writes as follows: "Through all the night of the 30th there was raging a storm the like of which I cannot remember; torrents of rain drenched the earth, the thunder-bolts rolled and fell without intermission, and the heavens flashed with a perpetual blaze of lightning."

From their beds of mud, and the peltings of this storm, the Fourth Corps arose to fight the battle of the 31st of May, 1862.

So with his army divided by the angry and swollen Chickahominy, McClellan's left wing was apparently at the mercy of General Johnston, who issued from his camps and attacked the advance of Casey's division upon the Williamsburg stage-road, about five miles from Richmond, at 12.30 P.M. upon the 31st of May, Longstreet's and D. H. Hill's Confederate divisions attacking Naglee's, Palmer's, and Wissell's brigades simultaneously. Casey's left soon gave way, uncovering Naglee's brigade, who, making a gallant fight and losing about forty per cent. of their force engaged, fell back upon Seven Pines, where, together with Couch's division under General Keyes, they for about three hours resisted the attack of four large divisions of the Confederate army,—Smith's and Huger's divisions having joined Longstreet, making twenty-three brigades opposed to our six. At about half-past

two o'clock Smith's attack along the Nine-Mile road on Couch's right was so heavy that it broke through the Union line near Fair Oaks Station, cutting off General Couch and Abercrombie, with four regiments and a battery, from the rest of Keyes's corps. There was unaccountable delay in communicating with General Heintzelman, who was at or near Savage's Station, about two miles in the rear of Keyes's head-quarters, with two brigades of Kearney's division near by, and his four other brigades distributed from Bottom's Bridge to White Oak Swamp, and it does seem incredible that we did not get our order to move until as late as 3 P.M. General McClellan from his head-quarters across the Chickahominy notified General Sumner to move forward at 2.30 P.M., and Sedgwick's division got into action upon the right of Abercrombie's brigade, having marched about two and a half miles from the Grape-Vine bridge by 4 P.M.; Kearney only got notice from Heintzelman at 3 P.M., put in Berry's brigade immediately, and brought Jamison's brigade into action by 4 P.M.,—Birney's brigade being held in reserve.

Hooker, with seven regiments, or a brigade and a half, did not get up in time, nor did Richardson's division, three brigades of Sumner's corps. Therefore eleven Union brigades, numbering sixteen thousand two hundred men, did the fighting upon the 31st against twenty-three rebel brigades, numbering fifty thousand men. The result of the day was that at night-fall the extreme right, about the Adams and Courtney houses, midway between Fair Oaks Station and the Chickahominy, was securely held by Couch and Sedgwick, while upon the extreme left General Berry's brigade and part of General Jamison's, Kearney's division, held fast in their position beyond the Saw-Mill road until about eight o'clock in the evening, when, finding that the centre of the line north of the Williamsburg road and Seven Pines had given way, they fell back to the line of rifle-pits established by General Keyes upon the 26th of May, which crossed the Williamsburg road about three-fourths of a mile east of Seven Pines, in which, upon about a mile front from White Oak Swamp upon the left to across the York River Railroad upon the right, Generals Heintzelman and Keyes had managed to collect probably seven thousand five hundred men,—viz., Birney's brigade of two thousand three hundred fresh troops, the remnant of Kearney's division, say two thousand men, Casey's division, twelve hundred, and Couch's division, two thousand; while still in the rear of this line was General Hooker with three thousand five hundred men, and to the north of the railroad General Richardson's division of three fresh brigades, over six thousand strong, were coming into action.

Colonel Trawin, of the Eighth New Jersey, in charge of the *Tête-de-pont* at Bottom's Bridge reports that he collected and returned to their regiments from three to four thousand stragglers. He also reports the Chickahominy so swollen on Monday, June 2, from rains or some

other cause, that all of the bridges, except the railroad bridge, were carried away.

The principal feature of the Seven Pines fight was the splendid service of the artillery, which held the vastly superior forces of the enemy at a stand-still upon the Williamsburg stage-road, and would have checked them in front of Casey's first position, a half-mile in advance of Seven Pines, if the precaution had been taken to slash the timber to the left of the Williamsburg road and in rear of the unfinished redoubt, from which position the Confederate forces, after dislodging Palmer's weak brigade, enfiladed Casey's lines. Casey certainly was not prepared for an attack upon this flank, and General Keyes expected it upon his right, but when Generals Keyes and Kearney formed the line one-half mile farther back at Seven Pines and swept the approaches to their position over the broad Williamsburg stage-road with case and canister from their batteries, the enemy wearied of a direct front attack, and Longstreet and Smith began to pour in solid masses upon the right flank along the line of the Nine-Mile road from the direction of Old Tavern. When night came they were about fought to a stand-still, and I greatly doubt, even if they had had more daylight, that they would have attempted to charge *en masse* down the Williamsburg road, in the face of the artillery and infantry then in position in the line of rifle-pits on Allen's farm.

But to return to my personal experience. As I have said before, it looked very gloomy when we reached the front. All hands seemed to have had an abundance of fighting, and, as we made our comfortless bivouac, we also felt as though "the soldier's lot was not a happy one."

I was soon asleep, only to be awakened some time in the small hours of the morning by a noise like thunder and a roar of frightened voices. It was a stampede, and what it ever amounted to I never learned, but I could hear men and animals rushing along the road a short distance from us. It was most appalling. I have heard it since, when a drove of cattle becoming alarmed rise suddenly to their feet, but that night I expect both the Johnnies and ourselves were in such *a highly nervous state* that, had they heard it also, they might have stampeded for Richmond.

Morning came, and just as our coffee and hard-tack was ready for us, the awful rattling sound of volleying musketry broke the stillness of the morning air. General Richardson mentions this firing as about the heaviest that he ever heard. I finished my coffee, but I could not swallow any more hard-tack. The accompaniment of small-arms was entirely too satisfying and so suggestive of a breakfast on cold lead, that it drove all thoughts of more tempting eatables out of my mind.

Soon came the orders to Fall in, Take arms, and Move off by the flank. In silence, without even the tap of a drum in the drizzling rain, we moved off to "glory or to the grave" across a cleared field of

apparently firm ground, but so water-soaked and boggy that we sank deeply into the mud and were forced to leave our artillery behind us.

Between the Allen farm clearing and Seven Pines a sluggish stream, an arm of White Oak Swamp, crosses the Williamsburg road, and heads up near the railroad. General Hooker led us in, and we moved rapidly down an old farm road by the flank and parallel to the railroad, only to suddenly receive the fire of the enemy from the wooded border of the swamp formed at right angles to the railroad. It was very hot for a while, but we saw old General Hooker out in the field at the edge of the woods swinging his hat, waving us forward, so we formed forward into line under fire and steadily forced the enemy backward, rolling up their right flank, while their centre was engaged with Richardson's force, the line of our advance being almost at right angles with and across General Richardson's front. At the same time General Sickles's brigade charged along the Williamsburg road upon our left.

Our advance was steady but very difficult as we passed through the densely-wooded swamp in our front in line of battle, alternately charging, then halting to fire.

General G. W. Smith, who was temporarily in command of the Confederate army after General Johnston was wounded, has published a communication in the January number of the *Century*, in which he says, "As soon as I heard that a large portion of General Longstreet's forces had not been engaged upon the Williamsburg road, I ordered him to renew the attack as early as practicable the next morning, June 1." This attack, he afterwards acknowledges, was made with six regiments, which were repulsed, while their retreat was covered by another Confederate brigade. Rather a weak attack for a victorious army to make upon a defeated foe, except for cause!

It was this swamp that proved such an obstacle to the advance of Generals Longstreet and Smith the evening before; it was literally afloat, and in advancing we would plunge off of mossy roots and over fallen logs into deep black mud. They could not have passed it in the dusk of evening and have held their formation! The only way left for them to advance was open to them June 1,—*i.e.*, by massed columns down the Williamsburg road and the railway track.

I think it took about two hours of fighting to regain the ground as far as Seven Pines. After which we were recalled to get our knapsacks, and completed our unfinished breakfast with a better appetite.

Upon returning to our lines we found General McClellan and staff upon the ground, and the reserve line of troops cheered us most enthusiastically upon our approach to the last line, formed the night before, as if to thank us for our services in driving off their late adversaries. It still lingers in my memory, the thrill of that moment, when amid the earnest plaudits of our fellow-soldiers we, as it were, passed in review before the commander-in-chief.

In his report of this engagement General Heintzelman says, "After some fighting General Hooker made a gallant charge with the bayonet, leading himself the Fifth and the Sixth New Jersey against the rebel troops and driving them back for a mile."

General Hooker says, "It gives me great pleasure to give testimony to the continued good conduct of the Fifth and Sixth New Jersey Regiments. Their ranks had been greatly thinned by battle and sickness, and they had been camped in the immediate vicinity of troops partially demoralized from the events of the preceding days, yet on the first indication of a renewal of the conflict I found their lines formed, and they were as ready to meet the enemy as though our arms had been crowned with success."

General Sickles's brigade occupied Seven Pines during the afternoon of June 1, and Colonel Potter, Second Regiment, reports finding a large number of Union and Confederate wounded there in the most distressing condition of want and suffering.

The enemy had formed a line near where General Casey's headquarters were before the battle, their line crossing the Williamsburg road at right angles, a half-mile beyond Seven Pines. Seeing a stage-coach with four horses driving towards their picket-line, Colonel Potter detailed three files of marksmen to stalk it. It was occupied by some distinguished Confederates, possibly by his excellency Jeff. Davis, and our men were so successful as to halt and capture it only a few hundred feet beyond their lines. The distinguished occupants dismounted hastily and ran to cover, but the two colored citizens upon the box threw up their hands and surrendered the coach.

Upon the night of June 1 the enemy barricaded the Williamsburg road and started to throw up a log breastwork upon this line, but they gave it up before midnight and retreated. They left a number of wagons stuck in the mud, and all along the Williamsburg road they unloaded and left supplies to lighten their transportation.

Upon the morning of the 2d of June we started to advance, and soon the old battle-field was crowded with blue-coated troops again. I well remember that our brigade was halted, closed in mass, upon the left of the Williamsburg road in advance of Seven Pines. Suddenly, down by the saw-mill to the left, towards the Charles City road, somewhere in front of General Kearney's advance, the roar of file-firing broke out. Colonel S. H. Starr, an old regular officer, commanding, immediately gave the following orders: "'Tention battalion, on First Division. First Battalion take wheeling distance. Battalion about face, then left into line wheel?" thus forming a line facing our left flank in the precise position where Casey's line first broke. The brigade commander then ordered all of the commissioned officers to the front of their commands, then the non-commissioned officers likewise, inward face collected, and advanced them in front of him, the same as he

would on dress parade, when he spoke as follows: "Officers and non-commissioned officers of the Third Brigade, we are about to meet the enemy, and in the heat of battle some of you may be induced by personal fear or excitement to give an order to retreat. I now notify you that no such order will be given. If it is necessary to change your position it will be done by some military order. An officer giving such an order will be ranked as an enemy, and shot by his companions."

But we did not have to fight there, and in the afternoon we were moved out into some swampy land that formed the head of White Oak Swamp, and did picket duty all night, far out in front of Casey's old position, knee-deep in water. I shall never forget that night. We were upon reserve at the crossing of one of the wood-roads, with orders not to go to sleep, and as I was sent in charge, I had to keep upon the *qui vive*. Towards morning human nature could stand it no longer, and I heard upon all sides the snores of sleeping men, accompanied by the splash of their muskets as they fell from their nerveless hands into the pools of water in which they were standing.

Upon the 3d of June I find in one of my letters I wrote home as follows:

"BIVOUAC UPON THE BATTLE-FIELD.

"The piles of dead men and horses fill the air with a stench which nearly suffocates me as I write. Oh, it is a horrible sight! I counted fifteen dead rebels within an area of ten square feet, lying half buried in the mud and water. What between sick, dead, and wounded, our regiment hardly turns out three hundred men. I am still well, but both officers and men are played out with fatigue and exposure. All of the general officers speak of the terrible condition of our camps upon this battle-field. The dead men were barely covered with mud, and frequently a hand or foot would be left projecting from their hasty graves. Soon came the sickening heat of the hot June sun. Next the baked ground began to crack; next came swarms of flies that settled in clouds upon the putrid mass exposed through the cracks. Next came armies of maggots, who in their loathsome crawling invaded wells, water, tents, food. Oh, it was horrible! It was one foul breeding-bed of pestilence."

The generalship of McClellan upon the Peninsula, while his army occupied a menacing attitude before Richmond in 1862, has been as recklessly criticised as it has been ably defended by himself, as well as by his faithful lieutenants.

As a soldier General McClellan should be judged only by the light of the information he was at the time possessed of, and the adverse conditions brought about by the delays of others, changes of plans, faulty organization of departments, and the dissolving action of the elements upon the treacherous soil of the Chickahominy must receive careful con-

sideration before reaching a verdict. But, above all, the impartial critic must bear in mind the fact that he felt a lack of confidence and support from the President and his Cabinet that sorely embarrassed him. Upon the 1st of April, 1862, he commanded an army in front of Washington of two hundred and fifteen thousand men and four hundred and seventeen guns; at the same time General Wool had fifteen thousand men and forty-four guns at Fortress Monroe. Within less than three months he was struggling in front of Richmond with about ninety-two thousand men of all arms ready for duty. Upon the 27th of July, nearly a month after the terrible Seven Days' battle, General Halleck, who was on a visit to the camp at Harrison's Landing, uses the following language in a report to the Secretary of War: "In regard to the force of the enemy, McClellan expressed the opinion that it was not less than two hundred thousand men, and I found that in this estimate most of his officers agreed. . . . McClellan's effective force, officers and men, is about ninety thousand men." In the outset any critic will be forced to grant that in his advance up the Peninsula, attacking double his numbers in fortified positions he certainly did not give evidence of timidity.

Upon the 26th of May we find General McClellan's army extended from Hanover Court-House, fifteen miles north of Richmond, to the junction of White Oak Swamp and the Chickahominy, occupying a front of about twenty-five miles, and covering his base of supplies, which he had established at White House, upon the Pamunkey River, about twenty-three miles east of Richmond.

Upon the above date General Porter's command of twelve thousand men had completely defeated General Branch's force of ten thousand men, and McClellan's army was advantageously posted to connect with General McDowell at Fredericksburg, placing General Anderson's division of the Confederate army (which confronted McDowell at Bowling Green) between two fires.

General McClellan's well-known intention of connecting with McDowell has become a matter of history, and the strong military position he at this time occupied demonstrated his ability to consummate this plan and unite his formidable army in front of the rebel capital.

The Confederate commanders at this time felt the urgent need of concentration. General Johnston reported to President Davis that he regarded McDowell's approach as a certainty, and General D. H. Hill appealed in feeling terms for an immediate consolidation of their armies, so that they should not be attacked and beaten in detail.

I have just given you the story of the battle of Seven Pines. Astride of the Chickahominy, his left wing, of less than twenty thousand men, received the attack of fifty thousand of the flower of the Confederate army defending their capital. His forces fought a drawn

battle and held their ground, inflicting heavier blows than they received, although the loss and demoralization of some of the divisions, *upon each side*, was fearful.

Right here was an instance where General McClellan was criticised for not attacking Richmond and following the retreat of Johnston's forces into the rebel stronghold. Undoubtedly, if at any time, during his campaign of 1862, McClellan had a chance of concentrating his forces and capturing Richmond, this was his opportunity, but it is also a matter of fact, recorded in every general officer's report, that the elements were against him, and that the condition of the roads and fields, and in fact the whole surface of the country, was such that it was barely possible to get infantry into line, and a matter of almost absolute impossibility to bring artillery into action.

I quote from General Hooker's report of the battle of Seven Pines, in which after vain endeavor to move two batteries across the open ground east of Fair Oaks, upon the morning of Sunday, June 1, he gave it up as an impossibility and went into action with infantry alone.

Ten days from this date General Burnside, who was on a visit to General McClellan's head-quarters, writes as follows to the Secretary of War: "The roads are in the most wretched condition. I was four and a half hours traveling nine miles! It is impossible to move artillery while they are so bad."

General Sumner on the right by superhuman exertions brought up one battery, which when in action recoiled deep into the mud, and the guns had to be lifted bodily by a large force of men and the location shifted after each discharge.

Upon the night of the 31st, General Sumner sent a regiment back to the Grape-Vine bridge to try to bring up two guns. Men could drag and lift guns where horses mired down.

The Confederates at the battle of Seven Pines suffered terribly from the fire of our guns in position and found great difficulty in bringing up their own; in fact, the general nature of the soil of the Chickahominy bottoms being of clay underlaid with quicksand favored a defensive more than an attacking force.

Colonel Trawin's Eighth New Jersey held the *Tête-de-pont* at Bottom's Bridge on the Chickahominy, and three days after the fight reported an immense rise in the river, which carried away every bridge but the railroad bridge to White House, which was fortunately left to provide for the forwarding of our supplies. On the night of the 2d of June we were picketing to the south of the Williamsburg road, about five miles from Richmond, upon comparatively level ground, over which the enemy moved to attack Casey. The water stood in large pools, the continuing storms then prevalent having left the whole surface of the country apparently afloat.

Eight months from this date, upon the 20th of January, 1863, it

was my hard fortune to be with Burnside, when, after two days' rain, he got his army almost buried in the mud, within from five to seven miles from their winter quarters, and could not extricate them; and there, an object of ridicule to the enemy, who were observers of the movement from across the river, they remained, and were provisioned by pack-animals, until corduroy roads were built for the return passage of their artillery and pontoon trains.

General Lee on taking command after Johnston was wounded recognized the fact that what he wanted was, first, a strong line of breastworks and redoubts, and, second, to have McClellan's army attack his fortified position. One of his first orders was to appoint strong pioneer corps for each division under the command of competent engineer officers, and authorize the employment of slave-labor, in order to complete the said works as quickly as possible.

Upon our division front we also went to work to complete Casey's intrenched line. Although our men were battle-worn and weary from picket duty and constant calls to arms, within ten days we had established a defensive line, in front of which General Hooker stated to the writer that if they would attack his division in position "he would bury the Confederacy."

Undoubtedly, before General McClellan could establish proper and sufficient lines of communication across the Chickahominy, and the lines of approach had dried up sufficiently to admit of a general advance, the time had passed when it would have been wise generalship to have attempted to force an entrance into Richmond.

All this time the Army of the Potomac was extended, with its right arm thrown out in the direction of Fredericksburg, as though anxiously waiting to grasp hands with McDowell's army corps. If they were not there for that purpose, they had no right there at all. They should have been fortifying their right and extending south with their left. Reconnoissance made upon the 23d of May by General Naglee and the Eighth Pennsylvania Cavalry demonstrated the fact that there were practically no troops in position south of Richmond, while ten days previous Commodore Goldsborough with a fleet of ironclads had attacked Fort Darling on Drury's Bluff, twelve miles south of Richmond. An intrenched and fortified stronghold such as Richmond at this time certainly was, which can be readily turned or invested on its lines of communication, should never be attacked in front, nor should a wise general hazard a general engagement of great importance upon ground of his enemy's selection and fortification.

Had the Army of the Potomac, as soon as possible after the battle of Seven Pines, moved rapidly on Fort Darling and crossed the river there, or at some point below, General Lee would have been forced to do the attacking upon ground of McClellan's selection, and that, as

was subsequently proved at Savage's Station, Glendale, and Malvern Hill, was about all that was required to insure their defeat.

It is a great advantage in war to be attacked, especially when your lines of communication and supply are secure and the responsibility to the country, and the country's future, which General McClellan had to assume in ordering an attack upon this intrenched position, without a strong certainty of success, and without it was an absolute impossibility to accomplish the result aimed at in any other way, evidently deterred him from assuming the terrible risk. How great the general who in his cool judgment could thus subordinate his ambition as a soldier to his duty as a patriot! The general was always the citizen.

Upon the day of the battle of Gaines Mill, when he knew that Jackson was attacking his flank with overwhelming force, he telegraphed Secretary Stanton and implored him *for the sake of the country* to put some one general in command of the Shenandoah and of all the troops in front of Washington; he begged him to secure unity and bring the best men forward.

At the battle of Gaines Mill General Porter with twenty-five thousand men for a long time held at bay upward of sixty thousand Confederates. He did this in the open field without intrenchments, and inflicted terrible losses upon the Confederates before his lines were forced. Two years later, the position being reversed, General Grant attacked General Lee upon the same ground, when the Confederates, protected by lines of rifle-pits, hastily thrown up, were able to resist him so successfully that within a quarter of an hour he sustained a loss of about thirteen thousand men, or upward of ten times the loss of the enemy he attacked.

After the war, General Johnston said that if General Sherman had made direct attacks, as did General Grant on General Lee, he (General Johnston) would have defeated Sherman, but Sherman showed his wisdom by fortifying his own front and occupying strong positions on Johnston's flank.

In an attacking campaign of thirty-five days, from May 5 until June 10, 1864, the Army of the Potomac under General Grant lost upward of three thousand officers and sixty thousand men, while he inflicted a loss of less than twenty thousand men upon the opposing forces of the Confederate army. At Cold Harbor General Lee had about forty-five thousand men, and General Grant over one hundred and ten thousand men.

On the 25th of June, General McClellan was engaged in forcing General Lee's lines from the line of the York River Railroad to the Charles City road, southeast of Richmond. He had little trouble to push the enemy back to within five miles of Richmond, because he was advancing over ground, and towards works, where they were thoroughly prepared to receive and give him a warm reception. Fringes

of heavy timber, which separated the clearings and crossed the Williamsburg stage-road at right angles, had been slashed, and had been transformed into formidable abatis, and wherever our attacking division could have forced the passage in massed columns, it would have been through openings purposely left for them and in the face of a destructive fire of grape and canister, and after coming in front of the enemy's line they would have been forced to deploy and advance upon and over ground without shelter and closely swept by their musketry and artillery.

General McClellan's attention was called from Fair Oaks upon the 25th to meet Jackson's advance upon his right flank, and upon the 27th the first battle of Gaines Mill was fought, resulting in the breaking of General Porter's centre, at about seven o'clock in the evening, and the evacuation of the north bank of the Chickahominy upon the same night.

The giving way of his centre at the close of this battle was a surprise, as General Porter considered it the strongest part of his line, and the battle was about ended by darkness.[1] Immediately the very existence of the Army of the Potomac was menaced, as they were cut off from their base, and had only their wagons and their supplies at the Savage's and Fair Oaks Stations depots to depend upon. At that time it took about two hundred wagon-loads of stores to feed McClellan's army for a single day.

Again we hear the criticism from historians who aspire to be authorities upon strategy and logistics that General McClellan should have gone into Richmond upon the 28th of June. General Webb, in his "History of the Peninsular Campaign," gives General McClellan at this time a quota of ninety-two thousand five hundred effective troops; upon the 27th of June he had lost heavily: upward of six thousand men and twenty-two guns. Porter's, McCall's, and Slocum's commands were crippled by the loss of valuable officers, and their artillery could hardly be moved on account of the loss of horses. Casey's command at White House had to be ordered around to the James River by water. I doubt if he had man to man as many effective troops as General Lee. His entire transportation was also hemmed in between his front line and the Chickahominy. There were lots of soldiers who were classed as effectives at that time who were so worn by fever and disease as to be barely able to stagger into ranks and answer to roll-call.

Upon the 28th, General Ewell with one of Jackson's divisions cut the York River Railroad at Dispatch Station near Bottom's Bridge. The enemy were then upon the east, west, and north of him; he had to cover fifteen miles of line and protect his trains in transit towards

[1] Captain Frank Howell says General Porter advanced his centre on a counter-charge, and was caught by a counter-charge of the enemy.

the south. What troops had he to mass in solid columns and lead to slaughter before the earth-works of the Southern stronghold? Were not General Magruder's twenty-five thousand men behind a strongly-fortified line more than equal to double their numbers of an unprotected attacking force? Did not subsequent experience demonstrate the fact that a line of ordinary log breastworks thrown up over night made more than the difference of two to one? Was not the whole of Lee's army within supporting distance? What would have been the consequence to the Army of the Potomac and to the country had he made an attack along the railroad and the Williamsburg road upon the 28th of June and suffered as bloody a repulse as our army afterwards encountered at both Fredericksburg and Cold Harbor? Does not our country owe him a deep debt of gratitude for his wisdom and self-control in allowing the Southern army to come out of their works and do the attacking, with a loss to them of twenty thousand men to our fifteen thousand, as they did at Savage's Station, White Oak Swamp, Glendale, and Malvern Hill? Did he not still command the army that won Antietam? How would the history of the war now read had he wrecked and destroyed the Army of the Potomac charging Magruder's fortified front?

JOS. U. CRAWFORD,
Late *Captain Sixth New Jersey Volunteers.*