

# WAR HISTORY.

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## Operations of the Union Cavalry on the Peninsula, in Which Some Cum- berland County Soldiers Took Part.

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When it is considered by the highest and best authorities that it requires three years to transform a recruit into a good cavalryman, it can be understood why at the opening of the Rebellion, the authorities at Washington hesitated about organizing a mounted arm of the service.

The dash of the Confederate Black Horse Cavalry, at Bull Run, demonstrated the importance of cavalry and when the call for three—year troops was made, it was decided with some reluctance and hesitation to create a small mounted force.

The number at first mustered was too small to be of much value and until the winter of 1862-3, the government did not fully realize the importance of providing an independent and sufficient cavalry force. An organization was then perfected that thereafter proved efficient and effective.

Notwithstanding the inattention first given this arm of the service and the many disadvantages it had to contend with, being divided and sub-divided and assigned in detachments to different corps and division headquarters, some good results were obtained.

It may be conceded that the want of organization at first proved of advantage

in the end, for the reason that the field and line officers having to act independently and rely upon their own judgment became self—reliant, and were educated to exercise a due discretion in all emergencies, and not depend entirely on their superiors, who very often could not be reached. An opportunity was also afforded the men to gain or lose confidence in their immediate commanders.

Companies of citizens intended for cavalry, as they arrived at Washington were armed, equipped, mounted and sent across the Potomac to different division headquarters, regimental organizations being delayed until late in the fall. To convert these citizens, unaccustomed to the care of a horse and inexperienced in the use of arms, into cavalymen in time for the Spring campaign could not be expected; but the patient and persistent hard work performed by Generals Stoneman, P. St. George, Cook, Grier (known as old Billy Grier) Averill, Gregg, Pleasanton and those chieftains who in the early stages of the war were assigned to this work, and the weeding out of incompetent officers brought about a state of efficiency not equalled in the same space of time.

In the Peninsula campaign there were employed fourteen regiments of cavalry entire or in parts and two independent squadrons as follows: First United States, 4 companies; Second United States, 7 companies, Fifth United States, 5 companies; Sixth United States, 12 companies, Oneida, N. Y.; Third Pennsylvania, 12 companies; Fourth Pennsylvania, 12 companies; Sixth Pennsylvania, 12 companies; Eighth Pennsylvania, 12 companies; Eleventh Pennsylvania, 5 companies; Fifth Pennsylvania, 2 companies; First New York, 12 companies;

Sixth New York. 4 companies; Eighth Illinois, 12 companies; Independent at McClellan headquarters, McClellan Dragoons, 2 companies; Fourth United States, 2 companies.

The field presented for cavalry operations was a most difficult one, the topography and soil being such as to almost prevent the movements of a single regiment. Thick forests abounded filled with swamps and underbrush, the Pomonkey, Matapony and Chickahominy, tributaries of the York and James rivers were deep and sluggish making them formidable obstacles, and the sandy soil after a rainstorm seemed to have no bottom. These conditions made maneuvering of large bodies of cavalry impractical and confined the movements to regiments and squadrons.

The cavalry had been organized into a division commanded by Gen. Stoneman, and with the exception of a small reserve under Philip St. George Cook, they were assigned in detachments to the different army corps, with the McClellan dragoons and two companies of the Fourth United States at army headquarters.

The Third Pennsylvania led the advance from Fortress Monroe to Yorktown, attacking the rebel outposts at Big Bethel and driving them behind their breastworks at the latter point.

During the siege cavalry could not be used and the time was occupied in drill and instruction.

On the day of evacuation the cavalry was pushed to the front, Stoneman and Conk on the right, Chamblee and McLean taking the centre, whilst the Third Pennsylvania followed the main or Williamsburg road, leading to Williamsburg. The First and Sixth regulars under Stoneman and Cook struck the redoubts pushed vig-

orously their attack and swept cavalry, infantry and artillery before them. Chambliss and McLean cleared the way for Hancock, and the Third Pennsylvania forced Johnson's right behind Fort Magruder. The impetuosity with which the enemy were driven over fields, through swamps and underbrush behind their entrenchments stimulated the men, who, on following day (May 5th), fought the Battle of Williamsburg, where the nature of the country deprived the horsemen from taking a part. The splendid and successful charges lead by Col. Grier, the Count of Paris, (The Count de Paris is the father of the present Queen Mother of Portugal, also Helena, the Duchess D'Costa of Italy, who is now dying of consumption, also the father of the Duke of Orleans. who would now be King of France if the Orleans family were in power. He was here with his father in 1890), the Duke-de-Chattres, Major Williams, Capt. Saunders, Lieut. McClean and others in forcing the enemy from behind their redoubts and dashing into their columns on the way to Williamsburg, were matters of favorable comment at the time, and the men gained confidence in their own ability to cope with their antagonists. The morning following the battle of Williamsburg found the enemy retreating with the cavalry in hot pursuit. The Third Pennsylvania and Eighth Illinois pressed them for four miles beyond Williamsburg, capturing a large number prisoners, wagons, munitions and five pieces of artillery.

The cavalry were kept active in the advance of the marching army until it took position along the line of and in the swamps of the Chickahominy.

On the 25th of May Col. Averell was

directed to communicate with the gunboats on the James river, at City Point. He selected Lieut. Davis of the Third Pennsylvania, for this hazardous duty, who, with a few men, made his way along the various roads and by-paths over a country infested with the enemy's patrols and reached the river below City Point. After securing a boat he communicated to Capt. Rogers on board the "Galena" the position of the army and received from him a statement of the position of the gunboats. After making many de-boors he returned in safety.

Prior to the battle of Fair Oaks, Colonel Averell, whilst reconnoitering our front and left became apprehensive as to our security, and on May 27th reported to McClellan the condition of affairs. Gen. McClellan at once sent Col. Switzer of his staff to examine the position, and as a result. orders were at once given to select positions for outposts and batteries and leveling the forests. These precautions proved of value later on.

About this time, May 27th, our right was being extended to Hanover Court House, in anticipation of McDowell coming down from Fredericksburg. It is evident McClellan had the promise from Washington to be reinforced by McDowell, in which event he could have swung his right wing into Richmond, as at that time Jackson had not reinforced Johnson, but Gen. McDowell never came. (It will be recalled that Gen. McDowell in giving his testimony before the committee on the conduct of the war stated "that at the time his orders were so conflicting that he did not know whether to reinforce McClellan, whether to fall back on Washingtonian, or whether to remain at Fredericksburg.") The cavalry having the

advance Emory, Royal, Chambless and others, vigorously attacked infantry, capturing whole companies, sweeping everything before them and destroying at that point (Hanover Court House) the Virginia Central and Richmond and Fredericksburg railroads.

On the first of June Gen. Lee assumed command of the army of Northern Virginia, and on the 13th, in order to inform himself of the exact position of McClellan's army, sent Stuart with 2,500 men on a detour around its rear. Stuart's advance was met near Hanover Court House, by Lieut. Lieb of the Fifth United States Cavalry, who was out with a small scouting party. Lieb, though compelled to fall back, held on like a leech, harassed Stuart and after crossing Totopotomy creek made a determined stand, holding him in check for several hours. Flanking parties, however, compelled him to withdraw, when with a sullenness he contested every foot of ground until he reached the junction of the Bethesda and Mechanicsville roads where he was reinforced by Capt. Royal, who assumed command and a stubborn fight ensued, resulting in the death of Capt. Latane of Stuart's command, Lieut. McLean of the Fifth United States, the wounding of Capt. Royal and the loss of a number of men on both sides. Royal and Leib made a gallant resistance, but being outnumbered twenty to one, they were compelled to retire, which they did with a stubbornness that made Stuart keep his command closed up and prevented his doing much damage, and sending detachments to destroy the stores at White House Landing.

Two days later, the 3rd, Pennsylvania crossed the Pomomkey River on our right, passed up its left bank to King Williams'

Court House, and Elcott's Mills, burning the bridge and ferry boat, a schooner, and other boats and a ware house containing thirty thousand bushels of grain. scouts pushed forward in a hunt for Jackson, and his advance was soon discovered.

On the 26th of June the seven days' battle was opened at Beaverdam Creek, Stoneman was in the saddle confronting Stuart's Cavalry and covering White-House Landing, The following day remnants of the reserve Cavalry under Gen. Cook, were massed in the rear, ready to sustain the Fifth Corps when occasion required. About 5.00 p.m., Porter was being pressed on both flanks by superior numbers, and the cavalry were moved from their masked position preparatory to a charge if needed; in a few minutes the order to charge was given to the 5th Regulars (about three hundred) and they were led by Chambliss into the face of Longstreet's Corps, where they were almost annihilated; six out of seven officers and fifty men were stricken down. Chambliss hit by seven balls was removed from the field by the enemy unconcious. No charge was ever better ridden, save that of Keenan at Chancellorsville. (In the charge at Chancellorsville, Major Peter Keenan fell with 13 bullets through him, Capt. Charles Arrowsmith with 5 bullets through him and Adj. J. H. Haddock with a less number. At Beaver Dam Creek, Chambliss was struck with 7 bullets, which did not result in his death, but was sufficient to lay him up for repairs. He laid on the field for ten days when he was removed to Richmond, where he was tenderly cared for by Genl's. Hood and Feld. He eventually recovered.) In this engagement there were 3 squadrons of the 1st United States, 3 squadrons of the 5th United

States, 3 squadrons of the 6th Pennsylvania and one squadron of the 4th Pennsylvania Cavalry, none were included in the charge however except the 5th United states.

Two or three weeks prior to this date Captain Newhall and Treichel and Lieutenants Hyle and Miller, by direction, penetrated the country between the Chickahominy and the James; each officer with his escort taking a different route, taking bearings, hunting out routes, noting timbers, streams, buildings, cross roads, etc. From their sketches the engineers were enabled to compile a map which exhibited all the roadways, streams, bridges, fields forests, crossroads, swamps and farm houses; so that when the movement commenced towards the James, McClellan was better advised of the country through which he had to pass than his opponent.

On the 25th of June the 3rd Pennsylvania Cavalry led Key's Corps across White Oak Swamp and advanced to Charles City Cross Roads. Lieut. Davis being sent a second time to communicate with the gunboats on the James. On the 29th Capt. Whites' Squadron of the 3rd Pennsylvania with two hundred infantry and section of artillery, all under command of Cant. White, was sent to hold Jones' Bridge on the Chickahominy. Whilst Walsh's Squadron to which the writer was attached was advanced to Vine Church on the Quaker City road, to picket towards Richmond and Malvern Hill. On the morning of the 30th, (Sunday), when quiet prevailed in every direction and the soldiers were enjoying their pipes, suddenly their appeared in front of Walsh, a large force of cavalry which proved to be the 1st North Carolina and the 3rd Virgi-



nia led by Col. Lawrence Baker. They made a furious charge compelling Walsh after giving them a volley to retire. Their Ki-Yi yells stirred our reserve, which was about a half mile to the rear, supported by two guns of Major West's Artillery ; our reserve hurried into position ready to give them a Sunday morning greeting. When within range Major West opened fire which checked and disorganized the advance. When Welsh and Russel's Squadrons of the 3rd Pennsylvania made a counter charge, killing and wounding sixty of their officers and men, and in a race of two miles captured 169 men with their horses and equipments. Cornelius Vanderbelt of this county was killed in this action and Joseph Williams wounded,

July the 1st found the armies arrayed against each other on Malvern Hill. The topography of the country was such that the cavalry could not be used except for detail work, and they remained as spectators. The 3rd Pennsylvania occupied a position in the rear of the left wing and were engaged guarding trains near the Malvern House; they had the privilege of witnessing the slaughter of Magruder's command.

During the night when it was determined to withdraw to Harrison's Landing, Buchanan's Brigade of Bike's Division. Sixth Corps, with the 3rd Pennsylvania Cavalry, were assigned to cover the retreat off the hill under command of Col. Wm. W. Averill, with orders to remain on the hill until all the troops and trains were withdrawn over Turkey bridge. Before daylight the command advanced to the front, the infantry taking the center with the 3rd Pennsylvania deployed on either flank, squads of the 3rd Pennsylvania were detailed to dismount some disabled

wagons, divide the running gears, mount logs across the axle, use them as artillery, and put them in battery. A heavy fog prevailed at the time and our artillery ruse was effective. Five thousand dead and dying soldiers lay stretched before us and the agonizing moans of those living, awoke the tender sympathies of the rear guard; although the strongest hearts gave way to tears, stern duty forbade any assistance and the soldier on post was compelled to turn a deaf ear to the most appalling cries. After the morning sun appeared and the fog began to rise, a Confederate mounted soldier appeared on the field bearing a flag of truce, a staff officer was sent to meet him. He proved to be an officer who requested a truce for two hours in which to succor the wounded; the truce was granted, and their men allowed to come on the field without arms, the distance however limited.

The armistice granted was of course to our advantage and gave time for our trains, which crowded the bottom lands, to get out of the way. As soon as the hill was cleared and the last of the trains had crossed Turkey Bridge, Buchanan's Brigade was withdrawn and the 3rd Pennsylvania remained for an hour to give time for the trains to work their way through the swamp lands

Before leaving the bill, the writer was placed in charge of the extreme rear guard. On reaching Turkey Bridge he met a Col. Gibson with his arm in a sling, (having been wounded the previous day) who had been detailed to burn the bridge over Turkey creek as soon as all the troops and trains were safely over. After being assured that there was nothing left on the hill but broken down wagons, gun carriages and dead horses, he fired the bridge

which had previously been saturated with coal oil, and the writer remained to witness the flames. This same Col. Gibson had two sisters, who later on taught school at Carlisle, and my daughter had the honor of graduating under them. A weary march through mud and mire brought the 3rd Pennsylvania Cavalry to Westover Landing late in the evening, where it made headquarters until withdrawn to take part in the Antietam campaign.

The 2nd United States and McClellan Dragoons under Gen. Pleasanton on the 29th of June escorted Col. Alexander of the Engineer Corps to Carter's Landing on the James. Col. D. Mc.M. Gregg, with the 8th Pennsylvania kept watch on the left bank of the Chickahominy, and on the 29th swam the river, rafting its arms and munitions across at Long Bridge. Col. Farnsworth, 8th Illinois, was actively engaged covering our right wing and guarding trains.

The 4th Pennsylvania after leaving Gains' Mill, was with the Pennsylvania Reserves at Charles City Cross Roads on the 30th. On the night of July 31st Harrison's Landing was bombarded from the opposite bank of the James August 3rd Col. Averill with a portion of the 5th United States and a detachment of the 3rd Pennsylvania Cavalry crossed the James in a boat on an expedition to route the enemy and explore the country towards Petersburg. On reaching the right bank, Lieut. McIntosh of the 5th United States with 25 men was assigned the advance, and Lieut. Miller of the 3rd Pennsylvania with 25 men to follow in support. On reaching Cope's Mill the outposts of the 13th Virginia Cavalry were encountered, driven in, and their main camp vigorously assaulted and they were driven seven miles

with the 5th United States and 3rd Pennsylvania close on their heels. Their tents and supplies were collected and burned.

After returning to the left bank of the river orders were received to make a reconnoissance in the direction of Malvern Hill and Savage Station. On the 5th the 18th Virginia Cavalry was met at White Oak Swamp bridge. They were immediately charged, their column broken and driven towards Richmond, with the loss of a number killed and wounded, and twenty-eight prisoners and horses captured. This expedition ended the cavalry operations on the Peninsula, and we were later transferred to Maryland.

The total losses of the Union Cavalry in the Seven Days fight was 234, of which number 61 were credited to the 3rd Pennsylvania Cavalry. The foregoing narrative does not seem to apply strongly to local history, but when it is remembered that 90 soldiers from the Cumberland Valley, whose names can be furnished, participated in the scenes enacted, many of whom contracted disease in the swamps from which they never recovered, it can at least be claimed as semi-local history. I will recall one whom some of you know, who contracted chronic diarrhoea which ended in his death less than three years ago, Elias G. Eyster.