

## THE BATTLE OF BELINGTON.

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[The skirmish of which the following account is given by a participant, was one of a series of minor engagements taking place at Belington, West Virginia, July 7 to July 12, 1861. Brigadier General T. A. Morris, in his official reports, writes of the enthusiasm of the men, their coolness under fire, and his difficulty in restraining them. The advance regiments of the brigade included Milroy's Ninth Indiana, Barnett's artillery, Stedman's Fourteenth Ohio and Demont's Seventh Indiana, of all of which special mention is made.—JAMES G. RANDALL.]

THE Battle of Belington! I never heard of it. Quite likely. As a matter of fact, it never found its way into the reports of officers, and the newspaper reporters could get no clews to found a story on; and more, it was solely and entirely a battle begun and fought to an end by privates and "noncoms," independent of leadership except as some one more daring than his fellows, would push to the front shouting to his fellows to "come on!" when a rush would be made to support him. In short, it was the enlisted men's fight; with not a commissioned officer in the fray except an instance of which hereafter.

I do not remember the exact date when General T. A. Morris, with his brigade, took post at Laurel Hill. The brigade consisted of the Sixth Indiana, Colonel Crittenden; Seventh Indiana, Colonel Dumont; Ninth Indiana, Colonel Milroy; Fourteenth Ohio, Colonel Steedman; First West Virginia Artillery, commanded by Colonel Barnett.

The enemy, commanded by General Garnett, occupied a strong position, covering every approach to Laurel Hill gap. His position was not only naturally strong, but was well fortified. His force was about equal to that of General Morris, in infantry, while in artillery it was superior. General Garnett also had a battalion of cavalry while we had none at all. It seems that our sole object in moving up to Laurel Hill was to hold General

Garnett from reinforcing Pegram at Rich Mountain, against whom General McClellan was operating with a force under Rosecrans.

We held the hamlet of Belington, our advance taking post well toward the base of Laurel Hill, a peak of which, heavily timbered to the summit, loomed up on our right front, and the Beverly pike wound around its base and through the gap in a reverse curve like a reversed capital S, and then on straight through the rebel camp. The writer of this little sketch had been inside the rebel camp, and had pretty thoroughly scouted the country on every side of it, and therefore knew pretty well all that was to be found out by an outsider, concerning its situation, its forces, its armament and defenses. On moving up to our position, General Henry S. Benham, chief of staff, asked me if I had ever climbed the hill on our right front. I told him no; that there was fortification on the summit. There was a rectangular work of logs and dirt about forty yards square on the summit which could not be seen from our side of the hill, but was plainly visible from the rear. General Benham, however, thought that if the enemy occupied it, we would have heard from it at once; so to make sure, a company of the Ninth Indiana (I do not remember its letter, but it was the Logansport company), was ordered to make a reconnoissance. They soon disappeared in the laurel thickets, then the entire brigade held its breath for about five minutes, when the summit of the hill flamed out in fire and smoke, while volley after volley of musketry fairly shook the hill itself.

It is needless to say that our fellows came down out of that neck of timber faster than they went up, and that General Benham was fully satisfied as to its occupation by the enemy.

The next day the trouble began. Sharpshooters, located in the tops of trees, began to send bullets over into our camps. It became exceedingly annoying. General Morris was importuned by Colonel Milroy to let him take the Ninth and capture the position; but General Morris had been ordered by General McClellan to avoid bringing on an engagement. But "l' homme

propose, et Dieu dispose." It happened on Sunday morning. Sergeant Copp, the "fighting parson" of the Ninth, was in the midst of one of his fiery outbursts of religious zeal, when suddenly from the woods on the hillside came a rattling fusillade, mingled with Yankee cheers and rebel yells. Sergeant Copp pocketed his Bible, and, grasping his rifle which stood near, was off to the woods followed by his congregation as soon as they could get their arms. What was left in camp of the men of the Ninth was in line like a flash and in three minutes all were heading for the hill. But Sergeant Copp was stopped by General Morris, as were the colonels of the other regiments, all of whom were ordered to sound the retreat and get their men back. Officers were sent into the woods to bring the men out. Some of them were told to go to H—alifax, while others I fear did not try to exercise much authority.

In the meantime our fellows were getting the worst of it. The enemy's breastworks, with the headlogs in place, gave them an immense advantage. In the center, or nearly so, of their works stood a huge hemlock which towered far above the surrounding trees. I ran to Colonel Barnett, of the artillery, and, pointing out the big hemlock, told him to depress as much as he could with the trunk for a line and give them a percussion shell or two. He gave them three. Two of them struck the hemlock and exploded. The terrified Johnnies sprang up from behind their works, and—well, that was all. They were driven out of their fort and the hill was carried in less time than it takes my old hand to pen the fact. Colonel Barnett's third shell went over the hill and exploded in the midst of a troop of cavalry that was just about to start on a reconnoissance of the situation.

Thus ended the Privates' Battle of Belington. You see, the boys had got tired of taking chances under the fire of sharpshooters. Several men had been wounded, one of them a sergeant of the artillery, and so they made it up among themselves to drive the rebels out. There were some men from all the regiments mixed up in the affair but most of them were from the Ninth Indiana and Fourteenth Ohio.

The next morning before sunrise, the company flag of Company B, of the Ninth Indiana, floated over the fortifications of the enemy, who had silently evacuated the position during the night; and by sunrise General Morris was in full pursuit to overtake them at Carrick's ford. But that is another story.