



# U.S. Army Military History Institute

## VIGNETTES OF MILITARY HISTORY

July 21, 1980

No. 154

Contributed by Mr. Michael J. Winey

### SOME FLED; SOME BLED

A stampede of blue-coated infantrymen erupted from the woods into the clearing near Dowdall's Tavern. The panic-stricken members of the 1st and 3rd Divisions of the Union Army's XI Corps had been outflanked, surprised, and overwhelmed by the onslaught on "Stonewall" Jackson's superior forces of Confederates at Chancellorsville, May 2, 1863. All that remained between the rest of the Union Army and the Rebel hordes was one small brigade under Colonel Adolphus Buschbeck, consisting of the 154th and 29th New York and the 27th and 73rd Pennsylvania Infantry Regiments. Buschbeck heard heavy firing and commotion and saw the fleeing Northerners. He hastily swung his brigade into position to meet the attackers. The 154th New York was on the extreme left flank of the brigade. Colonel Patrick Henry Jones of the 154th barked the orders to choose targets and fire at will. The first fusillade from the 154th's Enfield rifles belched forth even while the fugitives from the other two divisions were still streaming through their lines. Buschbeck's little brigade was buying time and stood up to the Rebels pouring into their front and overlapping their flanks. The two regiments on the right flank gave way to the pressure on their flank and soon hastily joined the other retreating Yankees, leaving only the 154th New York and five companies of the 73rd Pennsylvania to face the oncoming enemy. Finally, the pressure being too great, these remnants had to give up the field or be slaughtered or taken prisoner. The 154th left 30 men dead, 10 mortally wounded, 78 wounded, and 162 captured before they relinquished the ground, the highest casualty rate of any New York regiment in that battle.

The members of the 154th New York bitterly regretted not being supported in their fight at Dowdall's Tavern. In the diary of Sgt. Horace Smith, Company D, for May 2, 1863, he recorded, "the 29th N.Y. of our Brigade ran like deer. Two Brig ran over us before we could see a Reb. our Regt fought like tigers but the drunken Rebs flanked us on both sides, so we had to foot for the woods." And on May 5, he again showered his invective upon the 29th when he wrote, "were relieved from the pits about sundown by the cowardly 29th . . . how I would like to give them a volley of musketry from our guns."

The 29th New York's term of service was to expire in June, and its members were not about to "lose their bacon" that late in the game. Then, too, they were mostly of recently immigrated German stock, and there was a great prejudice against the "sauerkrauts" amongst the native-born units. However, Horace Smith was right: The 154th did stand and fight until it was utterly impossible to stay any longer. It was the regiment's first battle -- perhaps they did not know any better!

SOURCE: Horace Smith, Diary, May 2-5, 1863, Mazomanie Historical Society, Mazomanie, Wisconsin.