

Story of a Regiment's First Fight
By John Fletcher Wellman

Do you mind comrades tis thirty years tonight,
Our Regiment received its first baptism in fight.
We had seen some service, in camp, and on march,
And knew what it was to be well parched,
In the dust, of the Old Dominion!
We had marched mit Siegle or'e the field of bull run;
Where the dead, lay in heaps, to bleach in the sun!
We had marched to Fredricksburg, in mud to our knees!
While we took in the chickens, we found at Dumfrees.
We were ordered to be thare, by a certain day,
But the short-legged Dutchman, got stuck, mit the clay,
And with Siegle we got thare, one day too late,
Which likely saved us, from a much worse fate.
For we reached the field, late one night,
And not in time, to take part in the fight.
But we covered the retreat of Burnside's men,
Out of that Terable hell, called the Slaughter Pen.
We were ordered to Stafford, not liking it much,
But we sholdered our axes, and beat the Dutch,
In building some fine winter quarters.
Our quarters were built in surpurb stile,
And we taunted our neighbors, the Dutch, menewhile;
Because their quarters resembled a sty.
We soon learned better, you remember why!
It seemed Burnside had planed a visit to Gen E. Lee's
And ordered Siegle, to send men, to cut trees.
So Von Siegle, in looking over his corps,
Spied out the Regiment, who, if nothing more
Knew how to handle their axe's, a lot!
And he said, Colonel, you takes dot Regiment and trot
Right over to the river; then you chop!
And make a good road thru the timber,
So in midwinter, we marched over the frozen ground,
Hartily wishing the Dutchman, was in the Government Pound,
For it snowed that night, as we bivouaced in the timber,
And we were pretty tired, and not very limber,
But with hard-tack and coffee, and a sleep in the snow
We awoke in the morning better natured, I know.
And wondering much if the order was legal,
And if this was the way, we fights mit Siegle!
Then, we were soon at work, cutting the timber,
And makeing a road, down to the river.
A week of hard chopping and our task was done!

But what it was for, we had no idea under the Sun,
And we had no clue that the Army, was out
Till one dismal morning we were ordered about
And were retracing our steps, by the same Rout
By which we came.

After marching to the rear, a few miles that day,
We found the roads crowded with troops in our way!
We were ordered to halt and let them pass,
We complied, not forgetting, to give them the sass.
We had Learned, while fighting, mit Siegle!
The roads were smooth frozen, hard and strong
And the trundle of artillery wagons, was loud and long,
And our Rebel foes must have had ample warning
To lookout for Burnside's Army, before morning
And they did, as you will surely recall,
And it made our Army feel rather small.
Well, we had to unsling knapsacks, and wait
The coming of the hugh Pontoon freight.
We were to guard to the river, over Pine Ridge,
And then to help build, the Pontoon bridge
Over which our Army was to rush, en mass
And gobble the Johnneys, ever so fast.
All day it portended a down pore of rain
And we were waiting for the Pontoon Train.
By 3 PM we were drenched, in a driveing Rain,
Till it fairly poured, and the moving train
Began to cut thru the hard frozen roads.
And the Artillery wagons with their heavy loads
Had chrushed into mud, the crust of the roads.
And the mules were floundering knee deep in mud
And the Pontoon Train was down to the hub.
The Teamsters were cursing, and lashing the mules
Not minding at all, the government rules.
We were soaked clear thru with the poreing rain,
While stuck hard, and fast, was the Pontoon Train.
Then bayonets were fixed and the guns stuck down
While we grouped about on the rain soaked ground.
Thare we stood in the storm, and the night,
But never a fire, were allowed to light.
Then some one struck up, the old fermiliar song.
Which was responded to, loud and long,
"So let the pontoons wag as they will"
"We'll be gay, and happy still!"
Certain it is we did the best we could;
Under the circumstances, which were not very good.
Some laid down, tho the ground was a lake,

Others munched hard tack to keep them awake!
The rain had ceased, and the morning light
Showed Burnside's Army in a comicle plight.
The Rebels were haveing a great lot of fun;
Our Army whiped without their fireing a gun.
On the other side of the river, they were out in line;
And it was evidint, they were feeling fine,
For they quietly stood and chewed their cud
And they yelled accross, Burnside stuck in the mud.
Well we marched back over the muddy roads;
And to make it still worse, that night it snowed;
And as we lay on the ground, the morning light
Showed one unbroken shroud of white.
Then the snow mounds began to swell;
And men jumped up to sware like Hell!
Others to Laugh, and have a snowball fight
And it shureley was, a most comicle sight.
In winter quarters the army was settled once more
And Burnside resigned and took command of a Corps;
Then fighting Joe Hooker was the chosen one;
And he gave out; thare would sumthing be done!
Then, came the order, to wead out the cowards,
And we changed Corps Commanders from Siegle to Howard.
By April, the army was ready to do sumthing grand,
And Lincoln came out, to review the Command.
And tho we loved him, we had to laugh
At his comicle figure, when mounted and leading his staff.
As he rode at a canter, by the side of General Joe,
Who was a superb rider, as you well know.
But when in our turn, we marched in review,
And looked in his face, so loyal and true;
It seemed to inspire us with a deeper devotion,
To defend the old flag, for one country, one nation;
With hope in our brests, from this inspireation,
We were ready to battle all the Rebs in the nation.
Then we got ready for another advance
And braged what we'd do if we had a chance!
Then our Division was ordered to Kelleys Ford,
In advance of the rest of our army hoard,
We did picket duty on the Rapahanock River,
But had to keep our main body, under civer,
So as not to attract attention twas said;
Lest the Rebels, come over, and catch us abed.
Well, one night the pontoons were sent down and hid from sight
Next morning we were ordered to draw 60 rounds to be ready to fight.
Then just at dusk, we marched quietly down to the ford

And volenteers were called for, the pontoons to board.
Then the boats were shoved quickley accross the tide,
A few shots were fired; but the balls went wide!
For no one was hurt and we scrambled up the banks,
And in a very few minits, the shore was lined with Yanks.
Our Regement quickly formed in line of battle ready
And the Colonel's voice rang out, clear and steady,
Fix bayonets forward; quide centre; double quick, charge.
Then into the darkness, we charged with a will,
And soon brought up against Kelley's old mill.
Here the pickets were thrown out for the night,
And thare we lay on our arms till light.
At dawn, tho thare was a heavy mist,
A tole was taken which included all the miller's grist.
Likewise chickens, turkeys, and pigs and eggs newly laid,
Were all taken in, by the requisition made.
Then the Beagle sounded and we marched away
For we were to cross the Rappid-Ann that day!
We reached Germainia Ford at 3 P.M. that day
And here, the artilery, and trains blocked our way,
For the river was a Rappid-Ann, indeed!
And many a poor mule found out his need
Of longer legs, and more weight in pounds.
In which case, he would not have been drowned.
After a long and tiresome delay
We crossed on a foot bridge, and were again on our way!
Darkness soon settled over our dreary road
And our knapsacks seemed a double load,
As footsore and weary, we marched on in the dust,
And all because of the Terable must,
Which every soldier knows full well,
For it wouldn't do, for him to tell,
The General 'twas time to halt.
What time of night we finaly came to a stop,
With many so tired, they were ready to drop,
I do not know, just remember to recall,
'Twas on the plank Road, where Jackson, next day opened the ball.
In a very few minits, after the guns were stacked,
Knapsacks unslung, and thrown just back,
Our boys were sleeping in blissful repose.
None dreamed of what the morrow might bring from their foes.
The revelea was sounded at four in the morning
And we were soon at work, with a wonderful longing
For our coffee, bacon and good hard tack,
Of which each had plenty in his haversack.
But just when our coffee was nearly done

Our Rebel foes thought to have some fun.
Whiz! Whiz! Bang! Bang! Just over our heads.
But 'twas only some Rebel shell they said,
But they made in our camp a lively commotion
In which every soldier, lost of his coffee, a potion!
A few more shells were thrown just to let us see
How polite, the Rebel General intended to be,
By giving us a salute, for our breakfast.
Well, our breakfast was swolowed in rather quick time
And we were soon ready to fall in to line.
But some way, our General did not seem in a hurry
And we concluded not to get in a flurry.
So we looked about to see the Lay of the Land,
And to speculate what to do, in case we lacked sand
To stand up and fight.
We were on the Fredericksburg Plank Road
Two miles southwest of the Chancellor about
And near Doudat's Tavern, headquarters of our corps,
Hooker's headquarters were two miles northeast
While a good mile of timber at least
Lay between Howard's Corps and the rest of our army.
Sometime in the morning, we were moved by Division
And our Regement was assigned, its proper position.
1 Division on the right facing southwest and the wilderness;
2 Division, ours, on left facing east;
3 Division in center facing southeast.
Our corps as I remember the formation made
Did not seem to be in good order, to repel a raid.
Regements on angles with each other, hence
We were as crooked as an old rail fense.
With gaps at every corner.
But, we were altogether too raw
To be finding fault, or picking a flaw.
With General Howard's plan of battle,
So we waited to see how the guns would rattle.
About 9 a.m. Gen Hooker & Staff came riding our way,
And pointed out to Howard, the way matters lay,
Had he known Gen Howard, as well as he did later,
Thare would have been a change of Commanders instatter.
Most any good man in his place might have done,
Someone who would not have run,
Crying like a baby, after the flying Dutchman,
What plans were brewing, we were not supposed to know,
But be ready to shoot, and to fire low!
But any man, without eaven rank,
Could see thru the timber the movement towards our flank,

Which to our minds, boded no good!
For our scouts came in from the thick dark wood
And reported thousands of Rebels, amassing there,
But Gen Howard said, 'twas only a scare!
Thus the day wore on, yet nothing was done,
To meet the strike that was sure to come,
But all the Brass Bands in our Corps
Were playing airs, Rory -O'More,
Or yankee doodle-doodle, do, yankey doudle dandy.
We will whip the Johey Rebs, just so neat and handy,
As the day wore on with its music and fun,
We got nervous and watched the waining sun
Occasionally off to left we heard a random gun,
Which broke the sullen silence of our foe,
But what it meant we could not know,
It must have been near five p.m.
When two wild deer, rushed thru the ranks of the men,
Of Shurtz, and Devens, Divisions,
The boys chased the deer, and began to yell,
Not knowing that behind them was a regular Hell!
With Gen'l Stonewall Jackson, as leader,
A few minits later and there were picket shots,
Which brought our regement into line in a jot.
Then came a long defning roar,
As though the rifles of a whole rebel corps,
We all let loose at once!
The next think we saw, on the ill fated spot,
Was the flying Dutchman, yelling mine Got!
Ze whole Rebel army, has got in our rear,
And if only, Gen'l Fonz Seigle was here,
For we fights, mit Ziegle, and runs mit Howard
And gives not a damn, if you call us a coward!
Soon the 1st and 3rd Division swept or'e us, in a flying mass,
And we were to meet the Rebels at last.
Our Regement was thin, about 700 strong
And we had been braging, all along
What we would do.
I'll explain sumthing of our condition,
Barlow's, the best Brigade, in our Division,
Had gone with General Sickles, as a scout
About one hour or more before the rout
And left us without any support.
Now very much quicker than I can tell,
The Rebels came on with that terable yell
Our soldiers learned to know so well,
For it always meant the death nell,

To many a brave, and loyal heart.
But on they came, like a gray line of mist,
Out of which the leaden bullets hissed.
Their stars and bars, floating mid the smoke,
Which plainer than their rifles spoke
Just who and what they were.
But our Regiment stood, a loyal line,
With our banner unfurled to the breeze so fine.
A moment more and our Colonel broke the spell
"That's the Rebels, Boys, give them hell!"
Then a steady roar, from our rifles pealed,
And the brown gray line before us reeled
And staggered, as if from a mighty blow,
Struck by some unlooked-for, hidden foe.
But on they came with a terrible must.
But surely their line was biting the dust,
And the brown gray line was getting thin.
For the way we were firing was no sin,
For our blood was up, and our guns were hot,
How long this lasted, I tell you not.
For none can measure the time in a fight,
With any hope of getting it right,
While the gray line in our front went down.
But the flanks of the Rebel Corps swept round,
And the first we knew, there was into us poured,
A rear flank fire, by the Rebel hoard.
And our boys were falling thick and fast,
But the old flag waived, mid the deadly blast.
Every other regiment from the field had fled,
Followed by Howard, crying, they said.
But the Hard-Tack Regiment was there to stay
So long as there was any hope of the day.
But our Colonel was wounded, our adjutant dead,
The Lt. Colonel ordered, "Fall back," for he said,
"We can do nothing more than to stop their lead
And all be gobbled."
I never like to think of our retreat that hour,
For we were raked with a regular shower
Of leaden hail and bursting shell,
And we had to go pretty much pell mell.
To reach the protecting timber,
And men were dropping on every side,
And to have said I wasn't scared, I must have lied.
For we were raked from flank and rear
And it made one feel somewhat queer.
At last we reached the 12th Corps line

And found them standing, firm and fine.
We reformed our line, round our colors thare
And gave three cheers to our Sargent who dare
To hold and wave them in Stonewall's face,
As we checked him in his head-long chase
Of the First and Third Divisions.
For we held for an hour, Joe Hooker said,
In that deadly storm of Rebel lead,
The whole of Jackson's Corps.
But the price we paid was a terable cost,
Of more than half, our number was lost.
For our Sargent had paced, with a firm tread,
Back and forth, in that storm of lead,
Which riddled the colors, with their silken strands,
And splintered the standard between his hands.
All honor now to the Sargent so brave,
He carried that banner right on to his grave.
He is sleeping now, with his comrades so brave,
For his blood stained the banner, he loved so to waive.
At Gettysburg battle, he fell in his might,
Neath the folds of Old Glory, he fought his last fight.
What was left of our Regiment, now closed up in line,
And taking position were ready a 3rd time
For whatever might come.
Our right rested, on the Plank Road,
Very near to the Chancellorsville abode.
In front of our line, and reaching half a mile,
Were the batteries, as thick as they could pile
And shotted heavy, with canister, and grape
All ready to knock the Rebels, out of shape,
When ever they came on again.
It had been dark some little time
But we could hear the Rebels getting in line.
A moment more and their "hi, hi, hi",
Was the signal for our batteries to let fly.
Right into their faces our batteries pore,
The missels of death, which thru their ranks tore.
While in the woods beyond our shot and shell
Rang out to them, the terable yell,
of death.
Three times that night, with courage and might,
Those Rebels charged right up to the light.
Of our guns, which shone in their faces,
And as some went down, others steped in to their places.
With a courage, worthy of a better cause,
Than trying to rend our flag and laws.

At length the fighting ceased and all was hushed,
Save the groans of the wounded, all mangled and crushed.
As the Blue and the Gray, together had rushed
And looked in death, they lay in their gore,
And were sleeping, the sleep, that wakes no more.
Thus ended the Battle of the Second of May,
But of our brave boys, what shall I say,
Dead, wounded, and dying, they were scattered about,
And largely the result of the criminal rout
Of Howard's Corps
And all for the lack of a man in command
Who would have seen that his Corps had a chance to stand.

Amonge our boys, we missed that night,
Was one from Company H who fell in the fight.
A bullet had pierced him thru the brest
As he stood in line and doing his best.
His rifle was smokeing, the muzzle was hot,
His friends saw him fall right where he was shot.
As the Regiment fell back, he was carried part way
By whome he was never able to say
But I saw him propped against a tree
And more dead than alive, he seemed to be.
For the blood was ozing from his brest and back,
The cruel wound of the bullet's track.
It seemed to me, he must sureley die,
And none were thare to help me to try
To carry him off the field.
There was but a moment for me to stay by,
For the Rebels then were very neigh.
His bunk mate wrote home, that he was dead,
But some way he beat that Rebel lead,
And turned up himself instead.
And he is here this night to tell,
How he lived to crawl out of that Terable Hell,
For we raked those woods with shot and shell
And how he escaped is a wonder.