

**BATES ALEXANDER**

General Ambrose E. Burnside led the Union Army of the Potomac to disaster at Fredericksburg in the winter of 1862. Launching a two-pronged attack against Robert E. Lee's fortified positions on December 13, Burnside's left temporarily breached "Stonewall" Jackson's Confederate positions. In the midst of the Federal breakthrough was the 7th Pennsylvania Reserves. Bates Alexander served in Company C of the 7th Reserves. Alexander joined a company from Lebanon County, in 1861. Serving in all the major battles of the Pennsylvania Reserve Corps, he was promoted to sergeant following the Battle of Fredericksburg. He was captured along with most of his regiment at the Wilderness on May 5, 1864. Surviving his prisoner experience, Bates Alexander mustered out of the army in 1865.

Bates Alexander, accompanied by his daughter, often returned to the battlefields to retrace the steps of the 7th Pennsylvania Reserves. Alexander traveled to Fredericksburg several times to walk the ground made hallowed by brave men's blood. The former soldier recorded his memories in 1895 and published them in a series of articles for the Hummelstown, Pennsylvania newspaper, *The Sun*.

'Twas Sunday, Oct. 26th, when we left Sharpsburg for the slaughter field at Fredericksburg, Va., where the Pennsylvania Reserves were to lose 1,700 men out of a total of 4,500. Bloody, blundering Fredericksburg.

On Oct. 30th we crossed the Potomac on pontoons at Berlin, Maryland. We lay at Brook's station on the Acquia Creek R.R. for several days. Here was a great scarcity of hard tack, the worst we ever experienced. We derived great enjoyment from sitting about our fires, telling stories, singing or card playing by fire light. On cold nights, we might lie with feet to fire, with overcoat cape wrapped about our heads, and sleep the sleep of the very essence of innocence, while dreaming of deviltry.

We arrived on the bluffs overlooking the town late in the forenoon of Dec. 11th, 1862. We were ordered to "load at will." One or two sections of artillery were firing leisurely from in front of our position, on the town, which was on fire in three places. To my mind at that day nothing in war had seemed so strikingly grand as this firing on Fredericksburg. Major Chauncy A. Lyman rode in from the guns and called out, "All quiet along the Rappahannock," while they were still thundering.

Next morning, we crossed on pontoons below the town, taking position on the river bank and on the extreme left of the army. On the morning of the 13th we moved a few paces down the river, then by the right, stacking knapsacks close by the Bowling Green road. Crossing the road (which had a row of tall trimmed cedars on either side) we halted in a wheat stubble, within easy speaking distance of the road.

Our division batteries were planted close in front of our lines on the most elevated ground. Being no breeze to carry away the smoke of our guns, the gunners on firing would quickly run to either flank to clear the great round volume of smoke hanging in front of their muzzles that they might see where their shells were going and their effect.

When thus standing in line, a cannon boomed out on our left, at close range, seemingly on the Bowling Green road. A shot whizzed high in the air, passing over our heads from left to right along the line. Naturally supposing from the position, 'twas one of our own batteries. We thought our gunners had had too much "commissary" this morning, and so remarked. Another report, then a third, each time the missile coming lower in the air, when they discovered 'twas the enemy. The order was given "down" when from the force of the custom we fell forward face downward. I had no time to notice who remained standing, being naturally engaged in pressing down hard, bearing on and flattening out that I might not interfere with any of the flying iron. This single gun, as subsequently learned, was commanded by Major John Pelham. Four cannons or more were turned on Major Pelham, leaving him no choice but to haul off and see us later.

In the early part of this cannonade we blew up one of their caissons, causing a cheer to break forth from our lines. But very soon thereafter they blew up one of ours, close on the right front of the Seventh's position, when the familiar squealing cheer of the enemy rang out. We thought them the greatest slights on the field that day. During this fire, two or three parties in the First Brigade sat playing cards on knapsacks, which may seem to some to have been somewhat out of place. In accordance with Burnside's orders of the previous evening, the Penna Reserves were the first troops to advance. Regimental commanders called, "Attention, battalion," and the line was ordered forward. As we passed our batteries between the guns, a good looking young gunner smilingly said, as he leaned against a wheel, "Boys, we have done our duty, now go and do yours."

Charging over open ground on enemy without firing a shot, while he is advantageously posted, is fraught with more than ordinary danger, advancing ranks are being decimated at every step. 'Twas even worse than standing in front of the famous cornfield at Antietam, as we lost over three times the number here. We were now well into the enemy's warm fire on this December day. The men inclined their heads somewhat as though moving against a driving rain. The familiar "chock," "chock" of balls striking the line was heard constantly to right and left while men tumbled out of line in quick succession. We seemed to press in hard on the colors; twice came very near losing my place in line.

The sharp thud of a spent ball on my front below the belt caused me to quickly look and feel for a hole in my overcoat, but no hole this time, though," 'twas no false alarm as I felt it thump against me with some force. Soon thereafter Wendling Fulmer said, "Bates, a ball went through your haversack." I had been wounded in the coat sleeves at the wrist, ball passing through overcoat and dress coat sleeves, carrying away a bit of hide and, allowing about one drop of blood to come forth in defense of the flag. The spot burned as though a coal of fire had touched it. Another passed through the bottom of my haversack, cut away the bowl of my spoon and a corner of my button brush. 'Twas full of mischief, but happily did no serious harm. Before we reached the railroad something struck my bayonet, causing it to rattle.

We noticed a rabbit scooting in different directions in front of our feet. It got through rearward. This was our first prisoner. We may smile, snicker and jest as we will, but the fact remains that considerable nerve is required to march steadily against such murderous fire as that at Fredericksburg.

Arriving at the R.R. we halted and lay against the sides of a cut about three feet in depth. Here we lay for a few minutes listening to the roar of Yankee and Confederate cannon as they slammed into each other. I had a place next to a strange man, who was badly wounded by a piece of shell. As he lay against the bank, he was unable to lean forward to see his terrible wound, and asked a young Irishman on his right, "Arn I badly wounded?" He replied, "Oh, the skin is hardly broken." Turning languidly to me, asked, "Am I hurt much?" He was bleeding too much to last long. I answered, "You are hurt badly enough." "I thought so," said he. He asked me to please rip his trousers as he was unable to withstand the pressure; I ripped both legs to the knees.

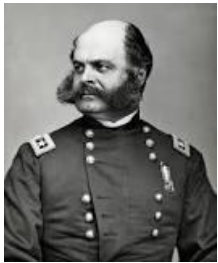
The line began to move forward. I had heard no order. 'Twas said Sergt. James McCauley, brother of Major Levi G. McCauley, caused the move by jumping up on the bank and calling, "Wide awake, fellows, let's give 'em h \_\_\_." The line went forward without regular order, making a grand dash for the woods. We gained the woods about as soon as any good runners similarly situated could have done. I could run at such times like a scared deer.

Gaining the woods, we slackened our pace. In an old grassy roadway, up which our part of the line was moving in a sort of helter skelter way, a tall sandy haired Georgian lay on his back gasping. This was the first sight on the field of battle that touched my heart. For some cause, I felt for this dying enemy and was almost sorry that it became a necessity for me to go to war. That dying Georgian at Fredericksburg can never pass from my memory.

Two or three small squads of prisoners unguarded, passed rearward. Some of them said, "Yanks, you have done it nicely enough, but there are more of Jackson's men on your front." But the "Men of Jackson" (Photo at right) had no terror for us at that moment. We almost imagined that as some of the enemy had fallen away before our advance, that the balance should do likewise. But, as will be seen, the falling away was soon to be "on the other foot."



We were advancing at a quick step without regard to order and it seemed "we didn't care for nothing," when a discharge of musketry, such as we had never before heard, greeted our ears. It sounded as one large gun. There was a sudden halt, "about face," and forward for the Yankee rear. The next instant, the gallant boys were almost flying down the old roadway or through the bushes. Arriving at the little old fence there was no time for graceful climbing. So I, for one, cleared it at a bound. This was one of my good days for running. Below the fence, Col. Albert L. Magilton's horse had been struck and he was holding it by the bridle while it vainly endeavored to raise. Col. M., commanded our Second Brigade at this time.



After crossing the track and commencing the slight ascent toward our artillery, we stepped at slow time. We had no line. The field was thinly covered by the retreating men, who, I thought, looked toward our guns with an expression seeming to say, "We should not do this," or, "How will we be received?" When General Burnside was appointed to relieve Gen. McClellan of the command of the Army of the Potomac, the newspapers of the day reported Burnside as having said he considered himself inadequate to the task of commanding so large a body of men, and some of us after Fredericksburg, thought 'twas so. The chief, who should have been present, was about very nearly absent. We have nothing very beautiful to relate of Gen. Burnside (Photo at left) in connection with the battle of Fredericksburg.

The lamented General John F. Reynolds (Photo below) said in effect, "Had Meade's division been promptly supported, there would have been a different story to tell of Fredericksburg." We discussed and growled over this and similar occurrences and do so yet when we meet. Many expressions were made which would seem not advisable to put in print. We had, or at least imagined we had, good cause for it all. Here we were ordered or allowed to get into a direful situation, as well as respectfully privileged to get out of it unaided. We did get out of it, minus 1,700 men

