

INCIDENTS OF CHANCELLORSVILLE

(by Charles Buek)

Having accidentally found today an old book describing the battle of Chancellorsville, and of the part taken by the 11th, corps, ~~also~~ which my regiment, the 41st N. Y. belonged, it has awakened old recollections, a recital of which may be of interest to my children and grandchildren.

At the time spoken of I had been detailed as clerk to the brigade commissary, being the 1st Brigade, 1st Division, 11th Corps of the Army of the Potomac. I was mounted and my functions were to draw from the post commissaries or from the supply trains when on a march, supplies as needed, and to issue them to the several regimental commissary <sup>ser</sup> ~~ser~~ <sup>gents</sup>. Our orders for this movement, which was nothing less than to cross the Rappahannock and attack Lee's army in his stronghold, were to start with 3 days cooked rations in the haversacks, consisting of crackers and salt pork, and for a supply of fresh beef we drove along 12 or 15 steers, beef on the hoof, to follow behind the marching column. We marched 25 miles up river, & crossed at Germanna Mills on pontoon bridges hastily laid, and at the end of the second day formed line of battle opposite the enemy as was then supposed, and expecting battle and victory on the morrow. I was busy until late that night issuing beef to the troops by the large brushwood fire, which lit up the woods around light of ~~axdixlentxxxxxxxfiresxxxxxherlightxy~~ and the steers were shot, skinned, cut up and cooked almost in less time than it takes to tell it. We herded our remaining cattle into the yard of a little country church, and I slept on the floor of the church sound until morning.

Every thing was quiet the next morning, which was May 2nd 1863 and only distant firing was heard, so I had nothing to do but to lounge around, riding to our brigade headquarters to report to my superior Lieut. Bernhard, and from there to general Howard's headquarters and back, trying to learn what was going on. Our colonel Von Gilsa was commanding the brigade, and as the day was hot, was lying with his staff under a clump of trees, and I heard him say that we greatly outnumbered the enemy, but might be beaten for all that. Some time during the forenoon the commanding general, Hooker with a numerous staff rode along the lines, and I noted particularly general Butterfield, his chief of staff, whom I was to know very well later on.

It was afternoon, I was dozing on the steps of the church, the men in charge of the cattle were asleep, when I was suddenly roused up by two cannon shots in quick succession, followed by a rattling volley of musketry, from the direction of where my regiment was posted. My horse was ready saddled, I mounted at once and rode over to corps headquarters where general Howard was just mounting, and I heard him say, " I hope Von Gilsa has not fired on our own men!"

I fell in behind his orderlies and rode to the extreme right of our line, where I found my regiment posted along the plank road in deep woods, facing to the front, and two guns in the road facing the flank. The gunners told me that they had seen cavalry coming down the road and they had fired, as had also the right company of the regiment. The cavalry had at once turned and disappeared without firing. What report was made to the general I of course could not know. But as I could see 200 or 300 feet down the road I noticed a body or bundle or something lying at one side. No one

seemed to care to go out and investigate, but suddenly there was a puff of smoke from it like that of a cannon fired, and I braced myself for the shot that I felt sure would follow, but nothing came, the general and the colonel rode away, and I returned to my church.

It was about five O'clock when I was again startled by heavy firing, both cannon and musketry, and soon saw our men retreating in disorder along the plank road and across the fields, while the well-known rebel yell told me that the enemy was attacking in full force. I told the head cattle man, Lorenz, to run his steers across fields and through woods to the rear, and myself rode up to the road, where a very mortifying sight met my eyes. Our entire division seemed to be broken and streaming to the rear without a semblance of order. I spoke to some of the men of my company urging them to make a stand, and to fall in with a regiment which was taking position behind a rail fence, preparing to make a stout resistance, but I saw no officers of my company, and the men all said that the enemy were too many, and that it was hopeless. I realized it myself when I saw their gray line sweep out of the woods far behind where our right wing had been. I watched one of our batteries dash up and unlimber, and open fire on the advancing foe, but it did not stop him and I believe the guns were lost. I left the road, struggled through some deep woods, and came out near the Chancellor mansion where Genl. Hooker had his headquarters. I watched Sickles third corps forming a new line of resistance, and then, as it was getting dark, started to look up my cattle and my corps, but in the darkness and confusion found neither. The firing had ceased almost entirely, and so I found a place in the

woods, unsaddled, tied my horse, he had to go without a feed, ate a few crackers out of my haversack, took a drink out of my canteen spread my rubber blanket on some leaves, found a soft stone for my head, and went to sleep, with the sound of a terrific cannonade in my ears, which I afterwards learned, was caused by some forty odd pieces of our artillery, run up in one battery, shelling the woods in our front, where the enemy was supposed to be preparing for another attack in the morning. But I slept soundly through it all.

I started out early the next morning to resume my search and fortunately found one of our supply wagons, where I got a feed for my horse and a dipper of coffee for myself, and was told that most of our cattle had been rounded up. Riding back to where heavy <sup>firing</sup> was going on to look for my corps, I found Lorentz in charge of the provost guard as a straggler or deserter. I got him released and kept on to some high open ground where I could get an idea of the battle. Down in the woods a hot fight was raging, wounded were coming up in large numbers, and as I stood there a brigade that had been ~~lying~~ lying down, was ordered up and with shouldered arms marched into the woods. Back of where I stood was a narrow country road leading down to the river, and the woods lining the same were filled with a division of the second corps, evidently held in reserve. Their arms were stacked, and hundreds of the men had climbed up into the trees to see what they could of the battle. Suddenly with the familiar whirr of round shot four or five cannon balls swept through the trees and landed with a thud. It made me laugh to see all those men as with one movement slip down to the ground. They certainly moved lively although I saw none hit.

As the brigade would be out of supplies that night, I searched around for a supply train, and finally found one at the river near what was known as U. S. Ford. It was now incumbent on me to find the brigade, get the signature of the commissary on the requisitions, and arrange for issuing. After some inquiries I found that the corps had been rallied, and now formed the left of the army, posted in deep woods, and to be reached by following what was hardly more than a foot path, impracticable for wagons. Following this I was soon stopped by a sentinel who warned me not to take my horse any further, as the next rise of ground, on the other side of which the troops were posted, was swept by the fire of enemy sharpshooters. Leaving the horse with him I walked cautiously up to the crest, and saw about twenty paces down, a slight breast work of logs and earth, hastily scraped out of a shallow trench, behind which our men lay, with the commander of the brigade and his staff right in among them. Stopping an instant behind a tree I ran down, just as I saw a man in gray in a tree on the ridge beyond throw up his gun. I heard the whiz of the bullet and the thud as it struck into the ground behind me, and the next instant was down in the trench. Upon explaining the situation to Col. Von Gilsa he said that he much preferred not to have rations brought up to the firing line, and referred me to the division commander Genl. Adelbert Ames for orders. Asking for my superior the commissary I was told that he had been relieved and ordered back to his regiment, and that a Capt. Musser had been appointed brigade commissary. Asking where he could be found no one knew, but someone suggested Washington as a likely place. So there was no one to receipt for the supplies, and I was told to do the best I could.

But if it had been a ticklish job to run down, it was doubly and trebly so to stand up in the trench and run up the hill, and I naturally hesitated for a moment, but a curt word from the colonel started me, and I ran expecting every moment to feel a bullet in my back. as the marksman could not have been more than 200 yards away. But he must have been otherwise engaged as none came and I ~~reached~~ reached the sentinel and my horse in safty. He told me that the brim of my black felt hat had a hole in it which was not there when I went up, so that the rifleman had after all made a pretty good snap shot, and I had had a narrow escape.

I found Genl. Ames in a small A tent in close conference with Genl. Howard, and explained that if it was his intention to relieve the brigade, Col Von Gilsa would much prefer postponing the issue until the change had been made. The Genl. curtly answered " ~~Yes~~ Give my compliments to Col. Von Gilsa and tell him to wait for orders"

I apologized for having stated the case clumsily and said "I am referred to you for orders, Genl. what are your orders, shall I take the rations up to the firing line?" He said "Yes take them up," and I saluted and left. Genl. Howard had not said a word. When I got back to where I had left the supply train it was gone, and the cattle men said that a mounted officer had ordered it away, and had been looking for me also. While we were still talking he rode up. He wore a light blue army overcoat without any insignia of rank, and asked at once "Whose steers are these"? I told him. He said, "I did not intend that beef on the hoof should be taken with the army". Then asked, "Do you know who is chief commissary"? "Yes, Lieut. Col. Laduc". "No, no, I mean of the army not the corps". "Yes sir Colonel Clarke."



"I am Col. Clarke. Take your cattle and anything you have right back to your old camp. The army will fall back to-night across the river, and take up its old position. Lose no time." With that he rode away. There was nothing to do but to follow his orders, and after an all night march we found ourselves back in our old quarters at Brookes Station.

I found there a tall, stout pleasant faced man in possession of our tents and quarters, who introduced himself as Captain Musser. He was in citizens clothes and had with him two cousins or nephews who were to be his clerks. But as neither he nor his clerks knew anything of computing, drawing and issuing rations, I continued to serve some weeks longer as acting brigade commissary. Captain Musser's title was by courtesy only. He was a civilian employee, not in the military service, had no military rank, was subject to no military discipline, and could drop his job whenever he liked, as he subsequently did when after the battle of Gettysburg the division was sent to South Carolina. Yet he had the responsibility of caring for the supplies of a brigade of fighting troops. Probably such things could not occur to-day.

---

CHARLES BUEK (Carl Herman Buek) was born Dec. 23, 1844, at Koblenz, Germany. His parents were from Hamburg. They came to the U.S. in 1848, settling at Brooklyn, N.Y.

Charles Buek enlisted June 6, 1861, as a Private, Co. K, 41st New York Infantry Regiment. (He lied about his age, claiming to be 18.) Mustered out as a Private, June 27, 1864. Detached to Division staff, Mar. - Aug. 1862, as a map maker. Detached to Brigade Subsistence and Commissary Department, from Jan. 30, 1863, where he remained for most of his service, as a commissary clerk.

After the war, he worked as an architect and builder in New York City with the firm of Duggin and Crossman. He purchased that firm in 1879, and reorganized it as Charles Buek and Co. He died Feb. 19, 1929, at Westport, Conn.

Beef for the Army.

