

VMI Archives

Fulkerson Family Papers

Manuscript#0363

ALS. Samuel V. Fulkerson to his sister, Kate.

1862 June 8 & 10

Although this letter bears the heading "8 May 1862" it refers to the events of June at the Battle of Port Republic

Port Republic, Rockingham Co.

8 {June} 1862

Dear Kate

The place at which this letter is written is a pretty village near the foot of the Blue Ridge and about twelve miles from Harrisonburg, at the junction of the North and South Rivers, which form the Shenandoah.

I wrote you last from Winchester shortly after our arrival there, giving you an account of our march and proceedings up to that time. Since then we have undergone and almost incredible amount of hardship. We stayed at Winchester two days after taking the place and then proceeded to Charles Town and Harper's Ferry. We found a few of the enemy at Charles Town, but soon drove them down to the Ferry, where they made a stand having been largely re-enforced from Washington & elsewhere. The enemy were in position on Bolivar Heights on the Va. side and on the heights on the Maryland side of the river. Both of these positions had been fortified by Genl. Johnston last summer.

A portion of our forces crossed the Shenandoah river and took possession of Loudon Heights. This was in the evening, a brisk cannonading going on, which was renewed the next morning, and continued till the enemy was driven from the Bolivar across the Potomac. About this time Genl. Jackson received information that Genl. Shields was crossing the Blue Ridge and Genl. Fremont was coming from Moorfield to form a junction at Strasburg and thus cut us off. This placed us in the hardest place that we have ever yet been. Genl. Jackson immediately ordered us to march back. We had about fifty miles to make to pass Strasburg, and our men were already terribly broken down by continued and hard marching. We marched to our camps near Winchester that night and next morning at day light started to Strasburg, which we reached before night. We had now marched about 70 miles in less than three days, in going to and returning from Harpers Ferry.

Gen. Shields was now at [Front] Royal, some 8 or 9 miles from Strasburg, and Genl. Fremont was 7 miles from Strasburg on the Moorefield road. So you see that we had only a gap of about 15 miles wide to get out at. During Saturday night I received an order from Genl.

Jackson (I was still in command of our Brigade) to proceed next morning (Sunday) at daylight, some two or three miles on the Moorefield road, take position and resist the advance of the enemy. Before I could get a position, our scouts informed me that the enemy was advancing, when I hurried forward to a suitable position, and made disposition of my own and two other Brigades which were for the time under my command.

I sent forward a company of cavalry, which soon returned at the top of their speed with the enemy's cavalry close after them. We drove these back, but in a very short time the enemy's infantry came down the road and through the woods at double quick, and when they got within range halted and opened a brisk fire upon us, which was kept up for some time when they were driven back again. By this time Gen. Ewell came upon the field and assumed command of the whole. After the enemy's infantry were driven back, they placed two pieces of cannon in position and the two forces kept up a very pretty and brisk artillery duel for an hour or more, when the enemy withdrew from the field. After this Genl Jackson came out and said that he did not want to bring on a general engagement then, and ordered us to fall back towards Strasburg. I do not think that we had more than 10 or 15 men killed and wounded. My Regt. had none hurt.

At this point, according to the sentence below, the date is now June 10th

A little after dark we left Strasburg for Woodstock to which place the waggon had been sent, and we had a terrible march. **(This writing above was suddenly stopped about 8 oclk on Sunday morning last by the enemies cannon, and I will now try to finish on this the 10th).** We got to Woodstock about daylight, all broken completely down and seemingly half dead. We were dogged all night by the enemy's cavalry, and I know that they picked up many of our broken down stragglers. I have between thirty and forty men missing, most I fear were taken. It is not to be wondered at. Many of the poor fellows actually walked much of that weary night, fast asleep, so worn out and exhausted were they with their terrible duty. I do not think that our Genl. exercised due diligence in getting his captured stores to a secure place. There was a vast amount of them, the greater portion of which he saved. But Genl. Shields made his appearance so suddenly at Front Royal that a portion of the stores captured there were re-taken together with some of our wagons.

We marched from Woodstock to near Harrisonburg, and the next day to near Port Republic, which place we reached on Saturday evening. I thought the next day, being Sunday, that we would rest, and I began to write this letter, when I was stopped by the roar of cannon down at the town. The town is located in the fork of the two rivers, the north and larger branch being bridged, the other not. The enemy's cavalry had dashed into town, with two pieces of artillery, one of which they planted at the end of the bridge, and with a third they began a fire from the opposite side of the river. Genl Jackson was in town and was taken completely by surprise and came near being captured.

We were camped about three quarters of a mile from town on the north side of the river. The enemy (Genl Shields force) had come up the river on the south side from Elk Run. In a very short time we were ordered to double quick to the bridge. My Regt. was just in the act of forming for inspection, and we got the start of the others. We passed through a wheat field with the enemy's gun from the other side of the river playing upon us. When we got to the top of the hill near the bridge the gun at the other end opened with grape upon us. My men returned the fire, when Genl. Jackson ordered me to charge through the bridge and take the gun. I led off and my men followed. We rushed through the bridge, captured the gun, and pursued the enemy through the town and until he crossed the south branch. I could have captured the other cannon in town, but I did not know of but one ford. We rushed to that, but found the enemy crossing higher up. We opened fire on them, killing some horses and two or three men and taking six or eight prisoners.

Charging in at one end of a bridge with a cannon yawning in at the other is no very pleasant past time. But my men went in so well, that it elicited the praise of the Genl. and all who witnessed it. When we got to the cannon, the smoke of the last fire was still issuing from its mouth. We charged them so quickly and so vigorously that my loss was little. Yancey Smith (brother of the Capt) of Russell was killed, and Sergt. E. Johnson and Walter James of Capt. Terry's company each had a thigh badly broken. I fear that Johnson is mortally wounded. We had put some of our artillery in position, which soon silenced the enemy's guns on the opposite side of the river, and drove them back, and they did not again advance on that day.

While this was going on, Genl. Fremont made an attack on our forces next to Harrisonburg. Our Brigade was ordered to hold the bridge and town against Genl. Shields, which we did, but could hear the fight on the other side, which lasted till nearly night with heavy loss on both sides. Our loss in officers was considerable. Genls Elzey & Stewart were wounded, though I think not dangerously. Our men drove the enemy back about a mile and held possession of the field during the night, having captured more than 100 prisoners.

On our march the day before from Harrisonburg, Fremont pressed our rear very hardly, and our protection subjected us to the heaviest and saddest loss that we have sustained in the valley. Ashby (but a short time a Brigadier) was killed. He had just made a brilliant charge on the enemy, capturing a Col, Maj., and a number of prisoners. Afterwards and about dark he was leading on foot (his horse having been killed), on Infantry Regt. when he was shot through the heart, and the saddest part of it is, that it is generally believed that he was shot by our own men. He was the most gallant man I ever saw, and withal a good man. When Ashby was between us and the enemy we felt perfectly secure against any surprise, and he was always on the enemy's heels. They had great fear of him. He kept them in constant dread. His place cannot be filled, and his death cast a gloom over the whole army. He had performed more feats of daring and had done more hard and perilous service than any man in the army.

As I have placed Sundays proceedings before Saturday, I will now pass over to Monday. During Sunday our train had been sent on the road towards Waynesboro in Augusta Co. But

on Sunday night Genl. Jackson threw a foot bridge across the north branch, ordered his train to turn back and take the road through Brown's Gap into Albemarle, and by a little after sun rise he had the greater portion of his army across the foot bridge and marching against Genl. Shields force, which camped the night before in sight of us about three miles off. Our Brigade and Genl. Trimble's were ordered to hold the large bridge and to resist the advance of Fremont. Our force and Shield's soon became hotly engaged, and the fight became a very hard one. Our men were being severely pressed and suffering a great loss, when Genl Jackson galloped back and ordered me to move forward my Regt at double quick, which I did. He also had the other two Regt of the Brigade ordered forward.

When I got upon the field, and was putting my men in position for action, the enemy gave way and we rushed forward, passing his battery which he abandoned, having first killed all the horses. In coming up we received a sharp fire. The enemy rallied and partially formed, but we kept on and they gave way again, and commenced a general run, and scatterment. My Regt happened to get in advance, and hounds never pursued a fox with more eagerness than they pursued the flying yankees. Some kept the road and some took the bushes, all intent on capturing a yankee. We captured about 400 prisoners most of whom were taken by my men, among them a number of officers from Col down. We also captured two Regimental flags, all of the enemies artillery (seven or eight guns), all of his ambulances & c., and a number of small arms.

The Infantry followed about six miles, and the cavalry having come up followed about six further. My men performed many individual acts of bravery one of which I notice, and you may send it to the Abingdon paper for publication. The rout was complete and entire. The prisoners say that Genl. Shields was not present, but that Genl Tyler was in command. We captured a number of our old acquaintances, the 5th Ohio, and our boys were glad to meet with them. After our Brigade crossed the north branch, Genl. Trimble crossed the large bridge and then set fire to it & burned it down. In a short time Genl. Fremont appeared at the burnt bridge, but could do nothing but listen to the fight and pursuit. On our return from the pursuit we quietly passed within plain view of Genl Fremont's camp, and marched to this place on the Blue Ridge, where we are staying today.

Our camp extends back to within four or five miles of Port Republic. Men were worse mangled in this fight than any that I have been in. Heads & limbs off and bodies torn open were frequent sights for several miles. On Sunday night Capt. Jno. Preston & Lieut. Jno Humes with fifty men were sent out on picket and were left out when we went into the fight on Monday. After Fremont made his appearance I sent back my Regt to bring in the picket, but he thought that he could not get to them, and come back about midnight last night. I have heard nothing from them since, but think and hope that they have gone to Staunton or Waynesboro, about 18 miles off. I am not in the habit of gathering spoils on the field, but one of me brought me a Col's horse, saddle, bridle & c. Another gave me a very pretty sword. The horse belonged to Col. Lewis of Pa. He has been a fine horse, but is getting old and is not a good riding horse. I also got the Col's Regimental flag.

You will see from this narrative that we have had a very active and exciting time. We have fought on three Sundays in succession, which will do pretty well for a religious Genl. I got Selina's letter the other day & will write her when I can. Write soon to Staunton. Don't know when we will go next. Love to Mother & Selina.

Your brother
S.V. Fulkerson

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