

In camp near Manassas Junction, VA

July 25, 1861

C. D. Jones

Commanding 1st VA Brig

General Jackson,

I received your orders of the previous week to take a detachment of the best men from the brigade, leave ahead of our force, and rendezvous with Colonel Medich. I cut short my furlough with the ladies of Winchester, and immediately began the ride to rejoin my men, already en route to the junction. Arriving early, around 2AM, and after wandering the town aimlessly for an hour or so I finally found the companies I was searching for bivouacked in the yard of the Westbrook's Cannery. Most of the men were bedded down for the night, but a couple of privates remained vigilant by the fire, awaiting the arrival of their commander. Privates Lamb, K. Sweitzer, and M. Sweitzer helped unload my borrowed mount and showed where my quarters had already been prepared. As mentioned in your last correspondence, sir, and as these men eagerly told me, the enemy has been reported on the move. A fight looked sure in the morning.

Despite the miles covered and the late hour I was reluctant to be weary. Re-joining my command, and just in time for a chance to strike at the Yankee invaders, gave me a rejuvenation of spirit. All pickets reported no activity but the idea of sleep was already too far from my mind. I enjoyed the campfire and peaceful morning till almost dawn when reports of enemy movements began streaming into camp. I personally awoke 1st Sergeant Lawson and others nearby to begin preparing for what was to come. 1st Sgt. Lawson came out his tent, stretched, and immediately started grumbling about the hour, the coffee, and the Private's ability to build a proper fire. Mike Lawson, veteran of General Scott's Mexican campaigns, former drill instructor at West Point who had trained such men as John Hood, JEB Stuart, and William Pender. The image of a grizzled soldier could no better be explained than by the sight of him. His harshness on the drill field, and ability to bring even the largest man to shakes with mere words had brought him ultimate respect in the brigade. Other soldiers passing by camp on the way to get water were heard grumbling about the earliness of their call to arms, my men were quick to reply that "We are Jackson's men, and his day starts one minute after midnight!" Soon after, the 1st Sgt. gave "Fall in!" Ranks were quickly formed, and the men awaited orders, an air of excitement was obvious. Colonel Medich had received word of an artillery battalion on

the outskirts of town with no apparent infantry support. His orders were to spike the guns while Colonel Perry's battalion sought out to destroy the infantry body.

Known for our hard fighting and quick maneuvers in past skirmishes, the Colonel gave us a designation as his "Ranger Company." We would be the battalion's initial strike force. Medich's complement was comprised of the 4th and 5th Texas, Wheeling Fencibles, and my own 2nd VA, totaling approximately 80 men. Having integrated men of the 2nd, 4th, 5th Virginias as well as the 11th Mississippi for our special duty we did not have a large company, but it was a strong company. Well outfitted, and with enough eager young lads that it seemed to bolster the abilities of the most grizzled and worn veterans.

As we stepped off on the march I could tell the men were ready. Despite the early hour, slight chill, and dense fog the column moved along quickly till a halt was called in a field edged by a road and dark thickets. The Colonel came up and filled us in on what his scouts had learned. The union artillerist camp was already awake and prepared; any idea of a surprise attack was quickly stamped out. Our job was to rush the artillery without giving them time or target, causing disorganization and giving the remaining companies time to sweep through. Using hand signals only, we moved into a position that revealed almost 200 yards of open ground, covered from all points by 7 field pieces. This did not faze the men and without hesitation or discussion we rushed forward and crossed the front of the enemy position.

The men moved swiftly around the enemy's right, stopping only to fire and then reloading on the run. Looking ahead, I saw Colonel Medich well in advance of his Rangers and coming up to an abandoned cannon. Urging my men to press forward quickly and turning them into the union flank we began to pass men in blue coats throwing up their hands or running to the rear. The 1st volley of the day was fired by the Texas boys in the direction of a couple of crews frantically loading their pieces. While a few men did go down, it did not stop the loading and before we could take it over the piece was discharged. The shell sailed past us and exploded within the Texans ranks.

By this time we were well worked into the enemy, and within seconds had put that gun out of commission as well. Prisoners were being sent rearward and all cannon had been spiked but one. A small howitzer and its four man crew had pulled back to the edge of the field and were swabbing out the bore before reloading. A mad dash was made to silence the final gun before it was ever heard. In moments we were upon them, showing no mercy to any that did not offer immediate surrender. The quick count was 15 of the enemy killed or wounded, and 62 captured. Our own casualties fared much better only losing 1 of our own and 15 in the battalion. However there was no time for celebration. We were soon fired on by a force of infantry with unknown size or firepower. A few shots were exchanged but a withdraw was ordered.

Reforming on the road and marching back toward town we encountered no further resistance. Reaching our own lines we posted on the extreme right, facing the direction we last encountered the enemy. I sent squads of skirmishers forward and to guard our flank. Should an attack come these men could forewarn us. After almost an hour, still no attack, and still no sign of the enemy. With much asking by the other officers and myself we were granted permission for a reconnaissance movement around the left and toward union encampments.

The Wheeling Fencibles and 2nd VA were selected for this mission. Following the lead of our fearless Colonel Medich we again marched in search of Yankee blood. Three blocks from our main body we spotted multiple companies of enemy troops making their way to the place we had just came. Always looking at the greater scheme, the Colonel decided against engaging this force, and instead sent a cavalry scout back to warn our boys. Continuing on, making a right on 5th Street, we crossed Main St and traveled down the adjacent dirt road. A short distance down this road across from a cornfield was the seemingly abandoned Union camp.

Moving with the same ferocity as earlier, along with a chorus of the Rebel yell, we charged into the sea of canvas. Resistance was slight and despite a disagreeable old Major who threatened us with an ax we found the camp to be civilians and children more than soldiers and goods. Sudden firing erupted from the direction of our main body. It started with a few pops, the skirmishers perhaps? We listened intently, a few more pops, then a massive volley...the Union battalion. Immediately the small column reformed and began a march to that direction. Block by block we worked our way back, searching for signs of the fight. The firing grew quiet, dying off as we get closer. Our current position put us in the enemy's rear, which could prove extremely helpful to the fight, but could also leave us cut off from the rest of our force. The next block opening was cornered by tall hedges. Through the hedges we could see two enemy companies falling back up the street that intersected our own. Having not yet been spotted I instructed the men to kneel in column of companies from the hedge extending across the sidewalk into the street. The enemy marched within 15 feet of our front, without every catching sight. Finally an officer glanced in our direction, horror filled his face, but before he could speak we charged their exposed ranks and without firing a shot inflicted over 30 casualties without taking any. In the Ranger spirit we struck and quickly dispersed in the direction of our own line before drawing fire from other units.

Coming up to our lines Colonel Medich began passing orders to reform the battalion in preparation for defense. We then noticed the devastation avoided during our reconnaissance. The Federal force had well maimed Perry's Battalion. It seemed as though the Union were preparing another offensive. We drew back a little farther to a small rise with our backs to a steep ridge. I yelled, "This is it men! Turn those people back

now or be crushed!" Linking with Perry's line we made a brigade front and held for whatever they could deliver. As the blue lines came toward us with superior numbers I noticed concern on some of the men's faces as they realized the true vitality of our position. Then as if the God of War smiled upon us the enemy halted and began advancing companies in echelon. First hit was the battalions right. The 4th TX refused their line and managed to hold off the enemy while taking heavy losses. Next a company we recognized as the 41st OVI struck our left, thus engaging my 2nd VA and Captain Van Wey's 5th TX. We put many blue coats in the dirt, but it did not slow their advance. This company pushed up close and fired a volley at our lines. With now a company of unloaded muskets and support too far in the rear we realized our opportunity as well as they did their fate. Without waiting for higher approval we quickly charged and wiped out another Union company. Those that had not thrown down to run away were now being marched to the rear as prisoners. During this time Colonel Perry's line had been pressed again but held a staunch resistance. The Yanks began falling back and were soon out of sight back through town. The field was ours!

It was around 9am when we arrived back at camp, made quick work of breakfast, and was back out on the line for battalion drill. The Colonel was very pleased with the battalion's performance earlier and did not hold us to grueling drill for very long. Upon dismissal of the battalion I held the 2nd for a time longer, running them through drills and maneuvers that could always be made more efficient. Then I released the men to their own accord until further orders. Many mingled about town, visiting the sutlers and shops. Weapons were cleaned, cartridges rolled, and boxes refilled. Around 1pm there was word from Headquarters that we would be moving within the hour. 1st Sergeant Lawson formed the company, inspected weapons, and posted the men in battalion line.

All of the officers were in good spirits. Our skirmish had set the men right. Proudly following Colonel Medich and our colors we marched onto the road from camp, "Head of the column to the right!" the Colonel yelled. Turning the block out of camp we were greeted by throngs of civilians, all in their best clothes, many waving handkerchiefs or little 1st National flags. This only served to bolster our egos toward what kind of defeat awaited the Yankees. It did not take the column long before we reached a Y, took the high road to our right, followed a dirt path through some trees, up a rise then up another knoll, which looked over the open hilltop. Matthew's Hill was the name. From the crest I observed Federalist flags flying on the opposite end of the field. Topping the knoll was our artillery, silently waiting for us to get into position. The path led behind the artillery, over the other side of the knoll where it cut down to the left into a dip of thickets then into the clearing. From in this dip we could no longer see the enemy, but the artillery gunners had sights set and momentarily after getting into the dip to begin deploying the guns opened up. Shells screamed overhead and landed on an unseen part of the Union line. Before our

guns could reload the enemy responded with their own artillery. A cannonade was occurring over our heads, but all we could do was wait for orders. Many of the men dodged and ducked as if they could avoid the shells that were landing closer and closer to us.

Perry's Battalion advanced to seek the foe while Medich's Battalion came up in support. Coming out of the dip our line of sight beheld a surprising number of the enemy. Perry advanced his troops well into range of them, halted, and began firing by company volley. The effect was immediately obvious. Holes became visible in the blue ranks, but were quickly taken from sight by the plumes of smoke from their muskets. A dozen or so men from Perry's 21st GA were taken down. Some started to the rear grasping wounds, most lay motionless in the grass. More smoke as our lead battalion had reloaded and was really pouring it into the Yanks.

Suddenly, a surge of blue out of the smoke, Smith's Battalion pressing Perry hard on his right. Despite a stiff resistance that halted the enemy advance his men began to crumble and fall back due to the heavy fire. As Perry's men withdrew a short distance our battalion was called up at the double quick to cover the gap and we poured a hellacious fresh fire into those people. This gave cause for more Union battalions to move against our left. We extended our line to the left, as Perry's men came up on our right. We held firm for a long while against several assaults. 1st Sgt. Lawson, 2nd Sgt. Whitla, and I walked back and forth the length of the line. Watching the men, offering words of encouragement, relaying orders from the Colonel on down. Sergeant Whitla kept yelling above the melee, "Hold steady men! Let them know Virginia is on the field!" The men were very ambitious and several times they would surge forward enough paces that I had to redress lines and contain the men.

Our artillery from the hill did good work on those people, but the counter fire was beginning to become costly. The Union had managed to position a field piece on a flanking hill, which did not allow us room for advancement for the fear of enfilade fire. Before the next hour passed the casualties had mounted on both sides. My men kept good order in the fray. The 4th TX posted on our left, bore the brunt of the artillery fire, losing over half their numbers. After much wear the battalion line began to waver in the middle, several bodies were strewn about up and down its entire length, and the last push was too much. The Colonel, with the colors, posted many yards to the rear and ordered a fall back. The Union pushed closer, covering the ground we had just abandoned. Casualties, though heavy overall, were relatively light in my company. Many of the wounded were trying to crawl rearward to avoid being swallowed by the blue horde. Several men stopped to lend a hand to their fellow comrades in getting them out of further harm's way. 1st Sergeant Lawson was holding his weapon aloft and directing the men into line when a minnie ball tore into his thigh. I think it just made him mad more than anything. Despite

my requests that he report to the hospital, he continued screaming orders, using his weapon as a crutch, hobbling up and down the line until passing out and being carried off the field.

We had reformed into a small battle front, firing at the enemy as Perry's men went around our right. His battered men making their way to the safety of the artillery position on the knoll behind us. Colonel Medich ordered one more push, but to no avail, the superior enemy numbers were just more than the men could stand. The battalion began to retire, following the colors up the knoll. As the other companies left the line I turned to Colonel Medich and informed him it was my intention to cover the battalion's rear before falling in the retreat. "Your Rangers will not fail you now, sir!" With a simple salute and handshake he was gone to tend to his battalion. The men looked at me for the command of retreat, instead I simply instructed them to keep up the fire and hold. These brave boys made the last rounds in their cartridge boxes worthy, putting the fastest fire they could muster on the advancing foe. We were being hit with numerous companies, but the battalion was not clear of the field. We had to hold awhile longer. My earlier appreciation for our light casualties had now diminished. The men were falling at an alarming rate. Private Lamb wounded, Private Sweitzer a sure fatal wound, many others who would never again stand our line. I could hardly bear seeing the men suffer, but with the determination of Virginia, they never broke. Holding till near capture then making a hasty dash up the knoll, safely tucking ourselves on the high road behind the sparse defensive line the brigade could make.

As it became clear the Yanks had been given their fill for the day we slowly began withdrawing our troops toward town around 3:30. While the men were obviously disheartened by this loss morale was still high. I believe we all took comfort in knowing another chance at the enemy would come soon. Upon returning to camp the men were instructed to clean weapons and rest. After checking in on the boys at the hospital, and promising to write a few letters, I took my own order personally, sir. Finally allowing myself a few hours of sleep before the...activities of the evening.

With morning came a wonderful breakfast prepared by the 1st Sergeant's wife who had traveled from their nearby home to be with her wounded husband. Shortly after "First Call" was given and the men fell in for drill. Colonel Medich was in fine fettle that morning and covered extensive drill of the hardest contemplation. It was rather time consuming and demanding for those who had spent the prior evening at the Flying Turtle Mercantile. Nevertheless we followed through to the end. Upon dismissal we stacked arms

and broke ranks till further orders. Being one of those “grounded turtles” I took the opportunity for further rest. I was awakened around noon by 1st Sgt. Lawson, and 2nd Sgt. Whitla. The 1st Sgt. had a thick bandage on his leg and was toting around a forked stick crudely fashioned into a crutch. “The battalion is being called up, sir, and how is the Captain now?” inquired Sgt. Lawson. “I feel wretched, but at least I don’t have a bullet in my leg.” I chuckled, “and how are you Sergeant?” “Nothing to concern yourself about, sir. I’ll be out of the ranks for a while, but Mr. Whitla is completely capable of filling the position.” As we walked through camp I gave a glance toward Mr. Whitla, young man, younger than myself, but so far a capable soldier. “Very good, take care of yourself, Mike” With salutes I turned to see the Battalion Adjutant, Lieutenant Rys, coming toward me. I was informed we would be force marching some distance past where we fought the previous day, to another hill owned by the Henry family. The urgency in his voice told me something was amiss. When I questioned him about it he simply stated that “We must hold till Jackson arrives, or all will be lost.”

Making all haste about camp the Battalion was formed and stepping off within the half hour. Traveling much of the same road as before gave time for reflection as well as ghoulissh reminders. In the ditches were strewn about items of all sorts. Frying pans, large knives, pistols, once thought to be a staple for war the soldier now thought of the extra weight and cumbersome attributes. I saw a soldier from the company in front of mine chuck aside a deck of playing cards with risqué pictures on them. Obviously concerned that in the event of his death, his possessions would be sent to his family and they would learn little Johnny was not as wholesome as he’d been raised. Intermingled with the abandoned and broken gear were yesterdays wounded, now dead. These men who simply could not take another step during the retreat, and were not found in time by the medical crews. My thoughts then turned to my own men. Many, like me, had joined to protect our home and fight for the Confederacy’s independence. Turning back and giving the ‘right shoulder-shift’ I saw the faces, stern and silent. All knowing what could lie ahead. I also thought of the faces that were no longer with us, either lying in a dismal field hospital, or still on the field from the previous day.

Without 1st Sergeant Lawson, Sergeant Whitla now marched beside me. Whitla, a former cadet of Jackson’s at VMI, also studied politics and law, so he naturally took to the higher sergeant’s position. The men already respected him, but there was a certain zeal about this man that made it seem with only a smile and a Rebel yell the boys would follow him anywhere...and ladies would do anything to gain an audience with him. I was rather proud to march and fight next to this true cavalier of the Old South. The road wound on a few miles then the column turned onto a narrow path leading up a hill toward a farmhouse. From the crest the surrounding fields and woods looked peaceful with no sign of the enemy. “By wing. Right wing, as skirmishers. Take intervals. From the Center.

March!” The 5th TX, Wheeling Fencibles, and 2nd VA began forming a long skirmish line and advancing forward from the crest, down the shallow valley and toward the woods. We moved cautiously, seeking out our foe. In a meadow to our oblique right, appearing out of the woods at a trot was a troop of enemy cavalry. They stopped some 70 yards to our front, a small creek dividing the spread between us. Their revolvers popped like corn in a kettle, but the distance was too great for their small arms. Not a single one of their shots found a mark in our line. The retort of our long arms, bridging the gap with deadly accuracy, put the small cavalry detachment at a major disadvantage. Some of the troopers instantly turned their mounts and galloped back into the cover of the wood. Within minutes they had all retreated, leaving us again with an empty front. This gave Colonel Perry enough time to deploy his battalion in support of our thin skirmish line. Advancing only a few yards more we could then see the long lines of blue waiting in the trees. A sure count was not visible, but the glint of musket barrels from their right flank far extended our own left. As the blue files began turning into line Colonel Medich brought up the left wing to strengthen Perry’s line and extend our own flank.

Artillery shells had begun crashing down on our ranks. So far, no casualties. We opened up with and maintained a heavy rate of fire as the yanks deployed. Many of the men hit their marks and by the time the Union line began advancing we had thinned out their ranks some. They pushed forward, taking fire from Medich’s entire front that now reached the width of the field. When the first of the enemy infantry opened fire the results were devastating. Numerous men fell to the ground dead or screaming in agony. We held our ground and kept fire on them. The enemy had two battalions on the field, our numbers were about even. Crossing the creek gave us opportune targets and many Yanks never reached our shore of it. This disorganization cost them precious time with reforming and redressing the lines for further advance. Colonel Medich took the temporary lull in the fighting to pull our skirmishers back through Perry’s line, letting his fresh troops move forward as we regrouped into battle line. Perry pressed them hard, but with little result. The lead Union battalion took magnificent losses but did not break.

A third battalion then marched into view, this put our numbers far fewer than their own. A disadvantage our boys made up for with fierce firing and excellent discipline. This new battalion moved quickly, crossing the creek and coming to the aide of their comrades. Now being hit with a brigade, Perry’s men had to fall back, making a long front by joining his right, and our left, flanks. We sent volley after volley into each other with no side seeming to gain clear advantage. Sergeant Whitla informed me the men were beginning to run low on ammunition. I thought back to the Adjutant’s words “...hold till Jackson arrives, or all will be lost” I told him the men must slow their rate of fire. Pick targets, aim carefully, and make the shot count. I paced up and down the line, watching the men fire, usually seeing a body fall on the receiving end. These men had been trained well.

Another push, the lines coming even closer together, some of the men were beginning to take steps backward, edging out of line, the coward beginning to show. Just as one of the boys dropped his musket and turned to flee he was stopped short by Sergeant Whitla. Placing the muzzle of his double barrel under the boys chin he very coolly informed him "Your options are as follows: Stand and fight like a man, or be spread all over this part of Virginia." Only taking a moment to decide, he smartly picked up his musket and began to reload.

The length of the fight was beginning to show, dead and wounded were all around. Finally a Union company broke, the 4th TX and Fencibles were ordered forward, putting enfilade fire down their exposed flank. That entire battalion soon started falling back. We advanced, and upon halting unleashed hell on the already shaken Yanks. Their supporting battalion shifted to cover the gap and direct fire toward us. Preparing for another advance I moved to the front of the line, raising my sword and it was then I got hit. A ball ripped into my arm above the elbow, spun me half around and hard to the ground. No sooner had I landed when Sgt. Whitla, Lt. Rys, and Pvt. Archie helped me to my feet and back through the line. The boys all saw me go down, the now blood stained battle shirt, and pained look. Knowing how this sort of thing affects morale I quickly retrieved a cloth from my haversack, ripped it in two then fashioned a tourniquet and sling. Redrawing my sword, standing alongside the men I shouted to them, "Keep up the fire men! Your commander is still with you! Let every Yankee son know the 2nd Virginia is here today!" Sgt. Whitla was trying to keep the ranks closed up, but holes were appearing faster than they could be plugged. He bravely filled holes with his own body, picking up the loaded muskets of dead men and blasting away at the foe.

Seeking out Colonel Medich I explained our situation, the men were hot, exhausted, almost out of rounds, and there was only a handful of men left fit for duty. I did not know how long we could continue this fight. Instead of responding, all I got was a smile, but before I could say anything he pointed past me to the rear and said. "Look." Whipping around could not have granted a sweeter sight. Troops, two battalions, the 5th and 4th Virginias, with you, sir, riding to the front, we had held long enough. After our short meeting I returned to my men and began passing along orders. However before the reinforcements were deployed Perry's line broke. Chaos ensued on that end of the line. The large framed Colonel Perry was in amongst his men, I saw him point his sword toward the stiff rank and file of the 1st Virginia Brigade and say, "There is Jackson standing like a stone wall. Let us determine to die here, and we will conquer. Rally behind the Virginians!" His men quickly began reforming behind the reinforcements. Moments later a ball struck the Colonel and he crumpled to the ground dead. When my men saw their comrades they greeted them with a hearty cheer. Now we could kick some ass. With Major Zarr's 5th and Major Dubiel's 4th at the front we pushed the already weary foe with

ease. Crossing the field with what felt like the might of the whole South. Captain Van Wey's Texicans to my left were putting down a lot of lead into the blue ranks. His men all were yelling like banshees as they went. 1st Sergeant Kocick hollering, "Compliments of General Jackson!" as he fired.

Union soldiers began to run, throwing down muskets and packs as they went, officers and sergeants grabbing at their cowardly troops. The Yanks had their backs to the creek bed, the bridge was clogged with men and horses all trying to escape our onslaught. Halting a mere 20 yards apart the panic was visibly displayed on Yankee faces. With only 2 or 3 rounds left per man we fired our final volleys. Two Union companies were attempting to cover the army's retreat. General Jackson ordering us to "Fix bayonets!" for the final push, we charged head long into them. I looked to the rear, the men keeping up with my swift pace. Back to the front, now not 10 yards from the enemy, they were poised to fire. Every rifle leveled at us. With a burst of flame and cloud of smoke I was brought to the ground. Pain seemed to be everywhere. I could feel the blood gushing on my side, clutching at the wound I tried to stand. Reaching a halfway sitting position the horror was shocking. My company was almost entirely dead on the field. Many of them piled in groups as they stood just moments earlier. The Union troops were gone, all I saw now was the rear of our line as they chased the Yanks over the hill. Making my way over to a man who was moaning and trying to wrap a bandage on his head I recognized Major Zarr, his face bloody and dirty. I embraced the old comrade and helped him finish tending his wound. My own had begun to clot, but fatal I was sure.

Looking over the dismal scene I only wished death would have come sooner to spare me the sight of my brave boys dying on the field from following my orders. As we went around the field, offering whatever comfort available, I found Sgt Whitla, still alive, but sparsely breathing and coughing blood, two bullet holes in his chest. "My friend," he managed to get out. I collapsed to my knees beside him, wiping his brow. "This was not the fate meant for you, sir," I finally said. He smiled slightly, strained a little, then reached into his haversack and produced a flask of spiced oil. Of course a gentleman to the end he offered it to me first. As is custom, and not wanting to offend a dying man I took a swig and then propping him up on his knapsack I held the elixir to his lips only for it to run down his chin. No effort to swallow made. There was a complacent look on his face, as if his goal all along was to die for God and Country. Wiping a few tears, I stood, dizziness took over, and then black.

I awoke in the Cannery, which had been turned into a field hospital at Miss Archie's request to help in any way possible. She has been a most gracious host, and a Godsend to my wounded men. Dr. McBride tells me that with much rest I will be back in the ranks in a month. I eagerly await news of any further triumphs with our now named "Stonewall" Brigade.