

150th BATTLE OF THE WILDERNESS & SPOTSYLVANIA COURTHOUSE

AAR - 1ST BATTALION - CAROLINA LEGION

I have the honor to report of the actions of the 1st Battalion of the Carolina Legion comprising the 26th NC, 6th NC, and elements of the 25th NC, 49th NC, and 22nd NC.

OVERALL COMMENTS:

I must say that with the lack of information coming out of the event planners, the small size of the main battlefield, as well as the confusion over the registration list beforehand, I was bracing myself for the worst. But, to my surprise, the event was enjoyed by all in my command even the perpetual complainers came out praising the event. Leading up to the event, the lack of information about unit portrayals and particulars of the battle scenarios was frustrating and concerning. Many in our unit like to tweak their impression to the unit being portrayed and also do some background research to make the experience more meaningful. To me personally, it usually means "we are not ready". On Sunday in particular, there was a clear disconnect with what the Federal command and the Confederate Command had in mind. The role we were told to do for the beginning of the battle became near impossible as every Federal they had spilled onto the field before the first shot was fired, leaving us little room to do anything in front of the works and making it seem ludicrous to advance into overwhelming numbers with Federals already on our flank. The fighting in the works became a battle of egos as Confederates refused to break and move off the works while Federals who were told they were to move into the works threatened to start a fist fight to do it. The result was an idiotic lull while both parties glared at each other and exchanged threats.

On site, the registration process was quick and streamlined. The long term parking was close as was the sutlers. Both are a rarity and much appreciated. The lack of signage to the camp caused a lot of confusion but the event provost made a good solid effort to fill that void. The camping area had its challenges being difficult to access from some directions but especially after we were allowed to extend to the more open wooded area across the fence, it proved to be one of the more popular camps we have ever had. The proximity to water and porta-jons was reasonable and I heard very few complaints.

SATURDAY MORNING – MAY 3RD

The Legion field music sounded reveille just after 4:00 as ordered and we made preparations to be organized and ready to move to the assembly area by 5:00. From the assembly area, we moved with the rest of the army to across the main road and to the edge of the wooded area for the morning battle. We were at once ordered to move into the woods. I ordered the left wing companies of the battalion to deploy skirmishers and move forward. The right wing companies were then ordered to deploy as well and followed the left wing as a reserve. Initially we encountered no resistance and only had to deal with negotiating the difficult areas of terrain the woods. As we neared the

opposite end of the woods we encountered a small group of Berdan's Sharpshooters and opened fire. The Berdan's were quickly overrun but refused to withdraw, surrender, or fight. They simply wanted to complain and one of their officers confronted some of our officers. They told him to fight, surrender, or get out. One of our men fired at fairly close range to one of their men behind a tree but he was unharmed.

On seeing a large body of Federals in line of battle at the bottom of the hill below us, I ordered the left wing skirmishers to halt and continuing firing while the right wing skirmishers set up a defensive fall-back position in rear of the front line of skirmishers. While in this position we received word that Federal troops were moving forward in the center of the Confederate lines and along our left flank. One company of our reserve was ordered to shift left to oppose that movement. As the fighting erupted all along our front, more word came of stronger pressure moving to our left. I ordered the remaining reserve company to shift to our left flank. We had only little pressure coming along the front of our line but the firing intensified on the left. I began to shift troops to the left of our line while holding back the attacks coming from the front. As more Federals spilled into the center of the Confederate line, they began to move beyond my left flank and at one point we were fighting three directions at once. Not wanting to be cut off, we continued a fighting withdrawal to the rear. We continued to shift our lines to match the terrain and to exploit whatever enemy weaknesses we could find.

Realizing that much of the fighting was moving further to the Confederate left flank and on the other side of the line from us we moved further back in to the woods hoping to find another enemy position to engage. In the course of sending out scouts to see where the enemy positions were, we spotted a Federal battalion to our rear facing the opposite direction. We moved quickly to position ourselves to be parallel to their line and advanced toward the rear of their line of battle. We closed to within about 50 yards and opened fire. The Federals were completely off guard and immediately called for a cease fire as they were no longer engaged in the fight. We ceased fire and realizing we were nearly back to our original point of deployment, we rested and awaited orders to assembly with the rest of the brigade. The entire fight was intense and confused. In short, it was the Wilderness personified.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON - MAY 3RD

The afternoon action occurred to the north of the Confederate works. The 2nd Battalion under Colonel Utz was deployed as skirmishers to our front. My battalion was ordered to deploy skirmishers in support of the 2nd Battalion. At a short distance before the earthworks, the 2nd Battalion engaged the advancing Federals. After a brief fight, the 2nd Battalion was ordered to withdraw through my line and retire to the earthworks. In short order the firing took its toll on my line and we too withdrew to the north side of the earthworks. There we waited as the Confederates on the North and East side of the works were fully engaged with the enemy. The repeated assaults against the eastern point of the works took its toll as that section of the line was overrun. My command was ordered to move forward in an attempt to retake the traverse closest to the end of the

works. Company after company pushed forward and suffered many casualties in that attack. Though it cost most of my command, we were successful at blunting the attack on that section of the works. Those of my command that remained manned whatever section of the works they could until the fighting subsided. That evening given the necessity of General Anders to vacate the field, I was notified that command of the brigade passed to me.

SUNDAY - MAY 4th

On the morning of the 4th I and my battalion commanders met with General Jennette. At that meeting my brigade was ordered to move along the same axis of our attack the day before but in line of battle and for my two battalions to take up position east of the Mule Shoe and adjacent works. We were told we would offer resistance to the Federals moving onto the field and only retire when pushed to do so. When we were to retire, I was ordered to rally my command in the open area behind the Mule Shoe and to plug any hole that opened in the line.

In the afternoon, as battalion after battalion of Federals moved onto the ground to the east and north of the works, we were told not to commence any movement until 2:30. By that time the entire field including our left flank had Federal troops already in position. I sent a runner to ask General Jennette if his original orders still stood. He told me to stay as far uphill as possible but to carry out my original orders. This would prove to be impossible to do. I move both battalions into position and advanced in echelon near the northern front of the Confederate works. As soon as our lines began to move forward, the brigade began to take fire from our left flank as the Federals there moved into the vacant works on the left. We barely made it to the end of the Mule Shoe before the overwhelming fire from our front and the left flanks made it ludicrous to remain. I ordered the 2nd battalion to break and fall back to the rally point behind the Mule Shoe as they were taking direct fire into their left flank. Then in short order I gave the order for the companies of the 1st battalion to collapse and also fall back into the works as well. Once inside the works we rallied the brigade and both battalions stood in reserve. The 2nd battalion was assigned to support the north face of the works while the 1st battalion was ordered to support the east face. As ordered, we would detach whatever was needed to plug holes in the line. This too would prove to be a fiasco as other commands were also ordered to do the same thing unknown to us. One officer approached Major Wenger and stated that they had been screwed by the Southern Division again as they were supposed to counter attack the breaches in the line. Major Wenger just told him that the commanding general had given us orders to do exactly what we were doing and we had no knowledge of what he was supposed to be doing. In truth, I can't say who did what in the confusion, but it was clear that there was little if any coordination. We did the best to salvage what we could for our respective commands. All that matters is that our men came away happy which is all I can hope to accomplish. As always I remain...

Your obedient servant,

Chris Roberts, Colonel Commanding
1st Battalion – Carolina Legion