

Battle of Secessionville

(June 1862)

Re-enacted Nov. 11-13

Field Report respectfully submitted by: Capt. Madden Co. B 88th NYSV, to Commanding officer: Col. Lance Dawson
Army of the French Broad

Nov. 11, 1861

Co. B of the 88th NYSV landed on James Island late in the day. We marched several miles to within a half mile of the enemy position in the fort. We made camp. Our orders where to set up camp on the enemy's right flank and hold our position until additional troops arrived on James Island.

Nov. 12, 1861

Reveille at 6:30

Co. B fell in for morning parade at 8:30. The men were drilled for an hour after a parade. Orders came down from command to have the men ready to fall in at 12:30. 40 rounds of ammunition per man were issued.

At 12:30 we march out of camp down a sandy road, within minutes we came upon a house fronted by a beautiful avenue of oaks. The plantation owners feed the men a hardy lunch.

Our march continued at 2:00. We headed east in the direction of the enemy fort. As we march we could hear the thunder of cannon fire. Our colors were unfurled. We were halted in the woods and stacked arms. Our cannon barrage continued, our hope being that the cannon barrage would soften the defenses at the fort. We had no cavalry support to scout the enemy position. We are counting on the rebel troops being confined to the fort.

We then marched in column out of the east woods. Col Dawson then ordered by company into line. We continue marching towards the fort. The battle field was quite as we continue to move forward, our colors flying brilliantly in the sun. We then went in to a battalion battle line. The men moved sharply into line. Once online the Col. Commanded 'Fire by Battalion' "Ready" "Aim" "Fire". Thunderous volley of muskets poured into the rebel position. We could see their cannon crews. When their Sgt.'s arm was raised, our men were ordered to lie down flat on the ground as canister rounds were fired over our heads. This was a killing field.

A company of Rebels appeared out of the woods on our right flank. The right wing of the battalion was ordered to refuse our flank. They began to take heavy casualties. Co. B took a direct hit of canister shot and several men were wounded. The order to fall back soon came. Our Company regrouped. I requested from the Col that we charge the fort after the next round of cannon fire and before they could load again; we might have a chance to breach the wall.

We were ready for the charge. The rebels fired canister shot again as the men lay flat on the ground. The order was given: "rise", then "Charge"! We were soon running at full speed to the fort wall, men screaming at the top of their lungs...

Musket fire from inside the fort hit and wounded a few men. As men reached the wall and began to engage in hand-to-hand fighting, it became obvious that we did not have the numbers to succeed in breaching the wall. We were ordered to retreat at the double quick.

We reformed the Company back behind the west woods on the right flank of the fort. We then marched back to our camp. The 79th NY posted rear guards to ensure the enemy did not pursue.

That evening in camp, a Private in Co. B, Pvt. Dillinger requested to speak with me. The young lad was at West Point when the war broke out. He was from South Carolina but decided to stay in NY and sign up with the Irish Brigade. He told me that during today's battle he saw his father in the rebel fort. He made eye contact with him. He asked permission to go out to the fort under a flag of truce to see his father. I agreed to let him go.

Not much time had passed when the lad returned with his father. His father told me that there had been a "Formal Ball planned by the local women in the area several weeks before the Yankees landed on James Island." He handed me a note from the rebel commanding officer calling a cease fire and truce for the night and requesting our men to attend the Ball. Quite an unusual request.

I and Pvt. Dillinger went to the Battalion Headquarters and spoke with Col. Dawson. He agreed to the cease fire. My wife Kay and daughter Katherine were very excited to hear the news, as was Capt. Munford's wife from Co. F.

We arrived at the Ball around 8 PM. We were welcomed into the dock house, the band warming up and the fire in the fireplace warming us up as well. We danced for hours - the Virginia Reel, the Waltz and many other favorites. It was a wondrous and remarkable site to see men of both armies there in peace and fellowship, reminding me of times past and hopefully of times to come.

June 13, 1861

Reveille 6:30 AM. While drinking my first cup of coffee a flock of geese flew over head. There were two formations of geese flying west away from the direction of yesterday's battle. I wondered if the Rebels were already active in camp and preparing for another attack today.

Roll call at 7:10 AM. Our ranks were a few short from yesterday, one sick, two wounded. We fell in for morning parade at 8:30. No drill today, which always means that we will be going into battle today.

The long drum sounded at 1PM. Each man prepared to do his duty yet again this day. We marched out of camp and down that sandy road again towards the rebel fort. Our battle plan was no different than yesterday's plan, but I'm sure our Col. was expecting a different outcome. As we stood and waited for the cannon barrage to cease, I could only think of the men at the Ball last night. How many of them would be casualties today? When will this bloody war be over?

We moved down the right flank of the Fort. Companies into line..... Battalion into line.... Fire by battalion...soon we were attacked by a company on our right front. The men of the 79th NY held them off the 88thNY and 4th NH kept up a continuous round of volleys into the rebel position. We were picking off gun crews, but still the rebels would man the guns. Our cannon barrage had virtually no impact on the Fort's defenses. We made three separate assaults on the fort and were repulsed each time. Both of our color bearers were killed. Our colors were saved and we retreated in good order.

Co. B 88th NYSV

3 killed

4 wounded

Questions:

When their Sgt. Arm - did you mean When their sergeant's arm was raised?