

AT "HELL'S CROSSING."

Bloody Baptism of Fire on the March to Santiago.

CAVALRYMEN TELL THE STORY.

Wheeler's Squadrons Led by War Veterans—The Single Highway Jammed With Troops—Orders, Orders, All Along the Line—Coolness Under Fire.

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VII.



ONE of the stories floating around division headquarters is that soon after noon on July 1, when the battle was heavy at San Juan ridge, but there was something of a lull at El Caney, General Sbafter's aid went to Lawton with a verbal order to abandon the attack there and go forward to El Caney road heights as originally intended.

Some such order was sent. The story goes on to say that Lawton told the aid he must fetch it in writing; that he went to army headquarters, got it in writing and returned with it to Lawton. At that hour Chaffee's men were charging forward, and Lawton pointed to them, saying to the aid, "It's too late." The aid insisted, saying, "But I must deliver it." "All right," said Lawton. "You will have to deliver it on the firing line." As that was impossible, the charge went through.

General Chaffee, when pressed for his views about Lawton in the El Caney business, simply said, "Lawton is a lion."

Lawton started from El Caney for the position on the El Caney road heights about dark on the evening of July 1. At that hour the divisions of Wheeler and Kent were busily digging trenches on the captured crest of San Juan ridge. The story of Lawton's further adventures in getting into the position assigned him will be taken up after a description of the battle of Wheeler and Kent on the American left. The whole illustrates the adage, universally applicable in war, about the best laid plans going "aft agley." In point of fact, El Caney fell about a day behind time, and that threw the battle of the San Juan ridge a day ahead of time as planned.

As the cavalry division was the next in order after Lawton, from right to left, when the army faced Santiago, and was the first to score a success on the San Juan heights, its story should next be told.

In the march down from El Poso to the crossing of the San Juan, the brigade of General Sumner, then commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Henry Carroll of the Sixth cavalry, had the lead. At that time Sumner was in temporary command of the division. The strength of Carroll's brigade that day in the fighting line was about 900. The Ninth cavalry, colored, under Lieutenant Colonel J. M. Hamilton, on the right of the brigade, had but one squadron in the fight. It was commanded by Major A. D. Dimmick. The Third cavalry was led by Major H. W. Wessels, son of Major General Wessels, distinguished in the civil war. The First squadron was commanded by Major Henry Jackson and the Second by Charles Morton. The Sixth cavalry, Sumner's one regiment, was led by Major T. C. Lebo.

With the exception of Wessels, all squadron and regimental officers, like the division and brigade leaders, were war tried veterans. Hamilton had served in the Thirty-third New York, Dimmick in the Fifth New York cavalry, Jackson in the regular cavalry and Morton in the Twenty-fifth Missouri as a boy, afterward polishing off at West Point. Lebo served through the war in the First Pennsylvania cavalry. All these officers are born soldiers, not carpet knights.

The brigade lost many men while lying along the road before the advance began. Grimes' battery having opened on the Spanish works about 7:30 in the morning, drawing fire of shell and shrapnel, some of which fell short of the target on El Poso hill and dropped among the troops lining the road to the front. At the very beginning there was a delay at the crossings of the creeks and river. The cavalry was on the right of the road, and the men say that they crossed the Aguadere several times, and that, including the San Juan, they waded streams six times before they were lined up in the charge. In some places the San Juan was up to the waist, and at other points the water was so deep and the current so strong that some of the men had to be assisted to save drowning.

The Third cavalry, which was on the right of Kent's infantry, lost heavily in what is sometimes called "The Bloody Angle," between the Guama and the San Juan, north of the junction of these streams. This place will also go down in the memory of Santiago survivors as "Hell's Crossing." The first man I met at Camp Montauk in the Third cavalry, Captain G. A. Dodd of Troop F, made famous by the Coesack drill, carries a long scar down his forehead, which was given him at the angle by a piece of shrapnel. A Spanish shot fired at Grimes' battery knocked over three men of Troop I of this regiment. When the brigade came to cross the stream, it was halted, and the regiments took position according to the lay of the ground. The men unshipped their packs and left them in the bed of the river. The bank in front offered a cover from the Spanish fire, and beyond that was a dense undergrowth,

The first order heard in this brigade came from Major Wessels to his own regiment. It was, "The Third is ordered to go through this brush!" Immediately Major Jackson's squadron deployed as skirmishers and attempted to advance. Morton's squadron deployed 200 yards in the rear as support. Major Wessels observed, "I don't see how we can do it, but we will if we can." Plunging into the brush, the men found that it was only a hedge on the border of an open field. When the skirmishers got through, they called out that there was cavalry moving across the front. That made it necessary to draw the line back.

Through the openings in the trees, Captain Morton and others saw the left of the San Juan intrenchments and Spaniards with guns at hand 600 or 700 yards away, looking at the American line. At this time the dynamite and the Hotchkiss guns in rear of the brigade opened fire on the Spaniards. The dynamite gun was choked with the first cartridge, and the cavalrymen say that the Hotchkiss gun was silenced by the Spaniards, who then turned their rifles and shrapnel upon the cavalrymen. In this plight the cavalry remained an hour and a half, subjected to constant volley firing and to shrapnel. The officers of the brigade estimated that the cavalry division suffered from 75 to 90 per cent of its casualties around that crossing. Dead and wounded were brought there through ranks of men, only a few of whom had been under fire before. Says Captain Morton, a veteran of 26 battles, "It was enough to rattle the bravest, but not an officer or soldier left the position, except to help the wounded."

To some old soldiers it may seem strange that at Santiago fighting men left the ranks to help the wounded. But that is according to the new order of things. Every man has a first aid package in his kit, and it is part of his duty to apply it when a comrade is stricken down. If it had not been for this, the mortality at Santiago would have been terrible. The first aid bandage stops the flow of blood and keeps the wound clean, also giving the patient relief and hope, which conduce to recovery. In general, officers criticized the "shameful neglect of wounded" at Santiago.

The next order to this brigade was brought by aids who came to Major Wessels and told him that the brigade was to advance. They could give no definite instructions. Wessels said that he was not in command of the brigade, but that Colonel Carroll was and was somewhere on the ground. The aids discussed among themselves what was to be done, and finally agreed that the brigade had an order to advance.

The cavalry troops spoken of before as being in front of Carroll's brigade evidently belonged to Wood's brigade. In attempting to move out of the range of the Spaniards' missiles and also to find clear ground to form in the different regiments got out of line, a matter which caused some confusion to the brigade commanders. It was this state of things which led to the assertion that the general officers were weak at San Juan ridge. The fact is that the ground was unsuitable for forming and charging in brigade columns. The regiments kept well together until they started to go up the hill, when some commands deflected to the right or to the left, according as they saw favorable ground or a Spanish position to strike at.

General Sumner says that the cavalry division was ordered to take position in the road near the crossing of San Juan; that he formed his line, and, being fired upon, said to a representative of General Sbafter who was present: "We cannot stay here without heavy loss. We must go back or go forward." The general added significantly, "Forward we went!"

There was no lack of fearless and capable men to carry orders to the commands through fire and blood. Colonel J. H. Dorst, the adjutant general of the cavalry division, was seen all along the line all day, and the same of Captain R. L. Horace of Sumner's staff, who was on horseback until the hill was taken.

After the aids had settled it that Carroll's brigade was to go forward Major Wessels ordered his second squadron to go forward, supported by the first, and to move at once. Captain Morton says that the majors did not take time to pass the orders along to the companies, but shouted out the command "Forward!" Then the line plunged into an almost impenetrable



SCENE OF CAVALRY ATTACK. [Note to Map.—The blockhouse, the human mark of it and the use of "Kettle Hill" had trenches. There were trenches between the blockhouse and the one north of it. Positions of cavalry regiments are approximate. In the charge the lines merged into one. Scale of map about 1,000 yards to the inch.] chaparral. Again there was a cry that there were troops in front. The line halted a few minutes, and it was seen that the brush was full of troops. It appears that the Sixth cavalry, the Ninth and the Third, and the rough riders from Wood's brigade were all aiming at the same point. Wood's brigade meantime had had experiences all its own, which must be told next in order to fill out the story of the cavalry division in its brilliant and successful dash up the entangled and rocky slopes of San Juan ridge.

THE PITILESS MAUSERS.

Kent's Soldiers in Front of the Blockhouse.

TOO HOT TO LIVE, THEY SAY.

Heavy Attack Ordered on the San Juan Stronghold—Fatal Delay at the Fords—Hawkins, With Two Regiments, Opened the Battle—Coolness of the Sixth Regulars.

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IX.



KENT'S infantry got the bloodiest end of it in the encounter with smokeless powder, blind trenches and Mausers on San Juan ridge. It started very early in the morning on July 1 from its bivouac near El Poso, but after a short march had to give the cavalry the right of way. This resulted in bringing the leading regiments abreast of the Tenth and First cavalry, the rear of Wheeler's division. When General Kent was asked at Montauk to tell of the storming of San Juan heights, he said, "We were ordered to take the heights, and we took them." In so saying the general plunged into the thick of the battle of words which has been stirred up over this very point of orders. Yet he paid a high tribute to the line officers and men. He said that it was a soldiers' fight. Regimental commanders did nobly, but, owing to the ground, could not see their full commands. Company officers had to act, and did, with good effect.

Kent's story is that at 7 o'clock on the morning of July 1 he went to the hill where Grimes' battery was in position before Grimes opened fire, and there Colonel McClernand, representing General Sbafter, pointed out a green hill in the distance as Kent's objective, on the left, he being instructed to keep his right on the main road leading to Santiago. The green knoll is on the same ridge as the San Juan blockhouse, some hundred yards south of that point, which is near the road, and therefore the objective of Kent's right flank. Kent had already sent Hawkins' brigade forward, and shortly after Grimes' battery opened, which was before 8 o'clock, he rode on and came up with Hawkins and his leading regiment, the Sixth infantry. At that point he was ordered to give the cavalry the right of way, which caused a delay of his advance 40 minutes. During that delay Hawkins and Kent went to the front under the fire of sharpshooters and crossed the main ford of San Juan river, already reached by the advance guard of the cavalry division, the Ninth regiment. They looked through the fringe of trees and saw the enemy's position. Hawkins thought he could turn the enemy's right at San Juan, but Kent did not agree with him and decided to put two brigades into column for direct attack. Going backward to hurry his troops, he met them just as they came under a heavy fire not only from the front, but from the dense thickets on the banks and from sharpshooters in trees in the rear of the moving troops.

The balloon was abreast of the head of his division, and shrapnel aimed at it fell among his men. The observers in the balloon pointed out to Kent a trail parallel with the road on its left. The Sixth and Sixteenth regiments were already in the road, past the forks of the trail, and Kent went back and directed the Seventy-first regiment into the trail, to be followed by Wikoff's brigade, in support of Hawkins. The Seventy-first became a stumbling block in the way of Wikoff's advance, and it was noon when the head of Wikoff's brigade reached the fording place.

When the Sixth regiment reached the ford, Hawkins was there and said to Colonel Egbert, its commander, "Somewhat beyond here you can get an enfilade fire on those works, and Lieutenant Ord will show you where to go in." The works on San Juan heights were within view. Marching to the front the Sixth formed on the left of the Sixth cavalry behind the fringe of trees, directly opposite San Juan blockhouse. Colonel Egbert looked over the ground in his front, and, finding that the cavalry pickets were being fired upon by Spaniards in the houses in front, sent out four companies as skirmishers to re-enforce the troops. These companies drew a heavy fire from the Spanish front. This halt was made between the Aguadere and San Juan.

Sending a battalion of the Sixteenth coming to his support, Colonel Egbert ordered his regiment forward in line of battle. Traversing a grassfield, the Sixth encountered a heavy belt of trees and undergrowth lining the high banks of the San Juan river. Taking Company E, Captain Kennon, with him, the colonel plunged into the stream, which was waist deep, crossed, and beyond the high bank found a road parallel to the river and inclosed by barbed wire fences. At a signal from the colonel the rest of the regiment leaped down the bank, waded the stream and clambered up the opposite side through the undergrowth, all coming to a halt at the wire fence. Captain Whitall, with part of the Sixteenth infantry also crossed and lined up at the fence with the Sixth regiment. The line as it then stood was a prolongation of the line on San Juan, or "Kettle," hill, which the cavalry afterward carried, as told in the last article. The rest of the Sixteenth regiment passed some distance beyond the Sixth, on its left and rear.

Colonel Egbert kept his regiment at

the road an hour, partially carrying out Hawkins' orders to enfilade the enemy. His men were somewhat sheltered by a hedge and a roadside ditch, but from their position could only obtain an oblique fire against the hill. In order to get a more effective fire the colonel decided to take his regiment across the road into the high grass and weeds beyond. A Cuban negro, who proved to be one of the heroes of San Juan heights, cut several openings in the fences with a machete. Through these openings the regiment advanced, and, lying down in the tall grass, opened a steady fire on the enemy's works, both by file and volley.

"Suddenly," says Colonel Egbert, "the blockhouse and trenches burst out with cannon and musketry, and the whole fire of the hill was developed on my regiment at short range. Here was to be seen the value of discipline. Our line was torn with shot and shell; men were falling everywhere. Captain Walker, commanding the right center company, and his lieutenant, Gross; Captain Torrey, commanding the left center company, and his lieutenant, Parry; Lieutenant Turman of Company F and one quarter of my men were down in ten minutes from the time the heavy fire of the Spaniards commenced. Yet no one blenched, and all kept steadily firing, without any thought of stopping until the order should come. This it now became my reluctant duty to give. I saw that the force on the hill, in its intrenched position, was entirely too strong for mine, and that if we remained another ten minutes the regiment would be destroyed. I therefore, with my adjutant, Lieutenant Bennett, walked along the line and cautioned the company commanders to move by the flank quietly but rapidly to the road again, which was done in excellent order, carrying our dead and wounded along with us. As soon as we had bestowed those in safety under the overhanging bank of the river we resumed the fire from the road."

In this plain language a soldier tells the story of the first encounter with the Spaniards at San Juan blockhouse. The range was less than 500 yards. The Sixth lost the highest percentage of any regiment at Santiago, and the greater part of it was incurred in this attempt to reduce the Spanish fire by answer in kind. Colonel Egbert, and Captain W. H. H. Crowell, commanding one battalion, were war veterans, Egbert of the regular service and Crowell of the First Ohio, light artillery.

With the Sixteenth as support the Sixth held on. The Cuban negro drifted over to the Sixteenth, thinking perhaps that it was about to lead a fresh attack. Wikoff, with the Ninth, Thirteenth and Twenty-fourth regulars, was then passing the San Juan at the trail ford and proving that "Hell's Crossing" deserves its ghastly name. The cavalry at this hour, still back behind the fringe of trees, thought that the infantry had been repulsed in an attack on the blockhouse. Perhaps others took the same view of it, for soon after that the sick and pain racked leader on El Poso hill sent urgent orders to Lawton to leave El Caney and move to his position as planned on El Caney road heights, north of San Juan ridge. Twice Sbafter sent this order, proof that in spite of bodily torture the brain had a full grasp of the situation at the front. Lawton, striking on the flank of San Juan ridge soon after midday, might have made the battle a masterpiece.

Meanwhile the artillery had not been idle in its efforts to help Kent and Sumner reduce the San Juan stronghold. Grimes' battery had a perfect view of the blockhouse at 2,600 yards and struck it at the third shot, say at 8 o'clock. The Spaniards replied, and at the fourth shot killed two gunners and wounded four at one place. Sbafter's adjutant general, Colonel McClernand, stood with the battery and directed its firing. He had a telephone wire to headquarters. Grimes once caught sight of the flash of a Spanish gun and, with that sole guidance, the Spanish using smokeless powder, pounded away for three hours with intervals. The black powder of his own guns hung like a cloud about them, making a perfect target for the Spanish artillerists. Some of their fire was from batteries in their second line, near the city. The balloon trailed along his line of fire and stopped action for a time. Another rifle battery, under Captain Parkhurst, got into position near Grimes, ready to unite its fire with his at the supreme moment.

Parker, whose troubles in landing the Gatling outfit have been mentioned, found his way to the front blocked by a stationary volunteer regiment, which, after opening ranks for the guns, cheered wildly and drew a fresh shower of Mausers and shrapnel. At last be reach-



STRIKING FOR LIBERTY. ed San Juan river in time to cross to the advanced cavalry position, and from there, later, train his guns on the blockhouse. The Hotchkiss guns also reached "Kettle Hill." At this time, too, Kent's last brigade, under Colonel Pearson, was moving down the San Juan beyond Hawkins and Wikoff to strike for the green knoll on the left, completing the line of battle 4,000 strong at the base of the blockhouse ridge. Thus, with the cavalry included, about 1,000 men, armed with Krug-Jorgensen rifles and carbines, stung to desperation by the long hours of torment, stood in leash for that grand heroic rush which is to make history glow with plaudits for the invincible American arms.

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