

furrows, or stumbled over carcasses. At intervals, darkness would be made visible on the right by a blazing brand dropping from some distant tree-trunk, still aglow in the depth of the Wilderness, like a signal-light of goblins. The low, damp air, reeked with the pungent, acrid snuff of horse and human slaughter.

### Combat with Fitz Lee.

Shortly before daylight (Sunday, 8th of May, 1864), the head of column emerged into the open country around Todd's Tavern, where a cavalry division was found, and a halt was ordered. No sooner were arms stacked than the men dropped, falling asleep directly they touched ground. Before, however, they had fairly stretched themselves, they had to be punched, kicked and shaken up to learn that more fighting was in order, before either lodging or breakfast. The crack-crack of carbines, reverberating in the forest glades ahead, closed up yawning jaws and put snap into numb legs.

Merritt's cavalry division, on the road to Spotsylvania Court House, was meeting a serious obstacle in Fitzhugh Lee, and, after considerable dismounted fighting, got out of the way of the infantry, which had been annoyed by the shifting movements of the led horses. The Maryland brigade was then deployed on both sides of the road, the Fourth on the skirmish line. Successive barricades of felled timber across the road were struck and carried, the enemy making a stand at each obstruction. In the language of the Confederate courier who bore the verbal message from Stuart to Fitz Lee, informing him of the march of Anderson's Corps to his relief and "urging him to hold out to the last at any sacrifice," it was of the "last importance that Fitz Lee should delay the advancing column and cover the position at Spotsylvania Court House as long as possible. His division of cavalry encountered the head of the Federal column of infantry near Todd's Tavern, about four miles from the Court House, and, dismounting his men and fighting with carbines, fell slowly and stubbornly back. The fighting was dreadfully severe, and many of the flower of Virginia's youth went down before the terrific volleys of the Federal infantry." The same writer then gives a spirited account of the reckless daring with which the horse artillery was handled by Major Breathed in covering the retreat, to which he attributes great importance in retarding the advance of the Maryland brigade, which led the Federal column, until the arrival of Anderson's Corps. (*In Memoriam*.—Major James Breathed, No. 3.)

Substantially the same account of this action is given by Stuart's chief of staff, who calls it "one of the severest conflicts in which Fitz Lee's division was ever engaged." (McClellan's "Campaigns of Stuart's Cavalry," 407.)

While this was the way the affair looked to the cavalry, their infantry opponents, whose loss was trifling, took it much less seriously. In fact, compared with what was to immediately follow, it seemed to them more like a pic-nic.

### Parallel March of Anderson's Corps.

All this time nothing whatever was known of the parallel and unobstructed march upon an inside track of Anderson's (late Longstreet's) Corps for the same objective point. Nothing of it appears to have been learned by the Union cavalry, although the routes pursued by the opposing forces were but one or two miles apart. Meade and Sheridan had some hot words over it later on, each holding the other responsible. (Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan, Vol. I, p. 367.)