

COMPANY B, TWENTY-FIRST VIRGINIA.



ONE of the finest companies to enter the Confederate service from Maryland was Company B, Twenty-first Virginia Infantry. The company was formed by Captain J. Lyle Clarke, and was composed principally of members of the Maryland Guard, at that time a famous military organization in Baltimore.

This company was mustered into the service at Richmond on the 24th of May, 1861, and sent out to Camp Lee, or rather the Camp of Instruction.

Captain Clarke there found another Maryland company under command of Captain E. R. Dorsey, which had been mustered into the service a few days before, and still later a third company was formed by Captain William H. Murray. These three companies enlisted for one year, but in some unaccountable manner the War Department conceived the idea that the companies of Murray and Dorsey were war companies, and they were consequently sent to Winchester to help form the First Maryland Regiment.

Captain Clarke and the splendid men under his command were dreadfully chagrined at being thus separated from their comrades, and pleaded to be sent after them, but the Secretary of War was inexorable. They were told to remain in camp until other companies were formed, when they would be sent to join the First Maryland, though they were but a battalion.

But, unfortunately, in the meantime troops were badly needed to operate against McClellan in West Virginia, after General Garnet's defeat at Phillipi, and all of the available companies then at Camp Lee were hastily formed into regiments, and under General Robert E. Lee were sent out to Valley Mountain, Captain Clarke's Maryland company being attached to the Twenty-first Virginia, under Colonel William Gilham, of the Virginia Military Institute.

After the memorable campaign against Rosecranz, in the summer and fall of 1861, the Twenty-first was transferred to the command of Stonewall Jackson, then in the Valley of Virginia, and participated with him in his wonderful campaign in 1862 up to the expiration of their term of service, on May 24.

Captain Clarke had the proud satisfaction of seeing nearly all of the company that had been spared immediately enlist in different branches of the service and those that survived served until the surrender.

Company B was certainly one of the best drilled companies in the Army of Virginia, and General Lee upon two occasions stated that it was the best drilled infantry company he ever saw, not excepting the regulars.