

CHAPTER VI.  

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Again the order to consolidate the Marylanders had to be postponed, for General Ewell could not spare their service, and they were the first to be sent off, and, as will be seen, were assigned the duty of opening the fight in Jackson's front a few days later at Gaines' Mill, or Cold Harbor.

At Fredericks Hall the troops were disembarked, and moved in the direction of Ashland, and on the afternoon of the 26th Jackson was fast nearing the position assigned him in the great army about to attack the enemy in his fortifications and raise the siege of Richmond.

It was late in the afternoon of the 26th that Jackson's troops heard the guns open at Mechanicsville, away down on the right, and in an instant their whole manner and bearing underwent a change, and they moved forward with an elasticity of step that could hardly have been expected of men who had marched so many weary miles.

Feeling that the enemy must be near, General Ewell ordered Colonel Johnson to throw forward a portion of his regiment as skirmishers, and it had hardly been done when the small body of cavalry in advance came in and reported the enemy in force but a short distance ahead.

The skirmishers from the First Maryland soon became hotly engaged, but they drove the enemy back steadily upon their heavy column of infantry, when the Baltimore Light Artillery was brought up and the enemy was pushed out of the way.

The march was resumed next morning, but had not continued many miles before a heavy column of infantry was observed a mile off to the right, moving parallel to that of Jackson. Jackson had not expected to see any Confederate troops in that quarter; but still he was fearful they might be friends. He, however, ordered a shot or two from a battery to be fired in their direction, when in an instant their skirmishers were thrown out, line of battle was formed, and the whole moved upon Jackson in perfect order.

A fearful tragedy now seemed inevitable, but was averted by the coolness and daring of Captain F. A. Bond and Lieutenant G. W. Booth, acting Adjutant. These officers, at the imminent peril of their lives, boldly rode forth in the direction of the advancing lines, and followed by watchful and anxious eyes were soon seen to enter their skirmish line and confer with the officer in command. They returned, and, to the relief of all, reported the advancing troops to be friends who had taken a wrong road and were thus out of position. A moment more and the head of Jackson's column would have been engaged with Mahone's