

Name: D. Archie Ridout

Date: 1862; September 14, 1862

Location: Burkittsville, Frederick County; South Mountain

Document Origin: D. Archie Ridout, *The life of Rev. Daniel A. Ridout, late member of the Baltimore Annual Conference, of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Wilmington, DE: J. Miller Thomas, 1891), *HathiTrust.org*

Type: Memoir

Subject: African American; Impact on Civilians; Military/Battle; Soldier/Civilian Interaction; Hospitals/Medical Care

Keyword: Maryland Campaign; Battle of South Mountain; Ceres Bethel AME Church

[Chapter V, pages 44-50]

ITINERANT LIFE CONTINUED ---HARD TIMES---BATTLE OF SOUTH MOUNTAIN

The Baltimore Conference met April, 1862, in Israel Church, Washington, D.C. This was an important and interesting Conference. The reports of the brethren showed that they had encountered many hardships during the year.

When the appointments were made, Daniel A. Ridout was sent to the Frederick and Washington County Circuit. This was that long, hard, mountainous circuit that he had traveled in '58 and '59.

He went from that Conference feeling, despondent, but without a murmur. He made up his mind to do the best he could, by the help of the Lord. The year 1862 was the hardest and most dangerous of any year of his ministerial life.

His family lived not far from Burkettsville, Frederick county, at the base of South Mountain. It was a picturesque but lonely spot. Everything passed off very well during the summer. The war, of course, had assumed a general plan; the Confederates were successful in nearly every battle. Barnes, in his incomparable History of the United States, says, "Washington City had not been in such peril since the war began."

The first of the Fall of this year, 1862, General Lee, "flushed with success, crossed the Potomac and entered Maryland, hoping to secure volunteers and incite an insurrection."

One morning we were awakened by shouts, and the rumbling of wheels. Arising, we found that the Confederates were all around us; they were pitching their tents and planting their artillery a few hundred yards from our house, and were making themselves generally comfortable. Things looked gloomy, I assure you; father was not home, and we did not know when he could get home, as the "rebel" pickets were scattered all over the mountain. They remained there for a week or more, during which time they were frequent visitors at our house. Mother, who was a courageous Christian woman, showed no signs of fear when they came, and, woman-like, would have her say.

A private came in one day, and made an insulting remark, whereupon she grabbed him by the nape of his neck and the seat of his gray breeches, and "fired him out" of the house. She then put on her bonnet and went directly to the Confederate camp and reported him. The officers made him come and apologize. At night, after committing us to the care of our heavenly Father, a duty which she never forgot, she would put us to bed and sit up all night with an ivory-handled dirk knife in her bosom.

We were all very much worried about father, and he was worried about us. He tried, three times, to get home, but he was turned back each time by the “rebel” pickets.

His prolonged absence became unbearable, and mother had concluded to send us to a neighbor’s and go in search of him. But on the morning of the 13th of September, he arrived home; that was the day before the battle. He said, “I had a hard time to get here; I passed all the guards safely until nearly home, when a sentinel leveled his musket at me, telling me at the same time to “halt.” After answering all his questions, he said, sneeringly, “Darkey preacher, eh?, well, pass on.”

We were all highly elated over the return of father. I came very near exploding; I showed him the amount of money I had made by dipping water from the spring in the end of our garden, with a little wooden pail, for the “rebs” to drink. They always paid me Confederate money, of course.

The next day after father’s return, was a day long to be remembered, and a memorable one in the history of our family. It was the day of the battle of South Mountain, September 14th. We were all up at day-break, no one had appetite for breakfast, except myself.

After the table had been cleared off, and were sitting gazing out the windows, a rebel soldier called. He was a young man, and made himself very agreeable. I will give his conversation with my mother as well as I can recollect it. Said he: “Auntie, we expect a fight here to-day; the yankees are coming, and we are going to make it hot as h---- for them.” Said mother: “Yes, and you had better take care of your own precious hide.” Then he began to dance and sing:

“I wish I was in dixie, look away, look away.

I’ll live and die in dixie, look away.”

Said mother: “Take care, young man, that you don’t die in Maryland.” How truly prophetic were the words of my mother, for he was the first dead man we saw after the battle, not over two hundred yards from our house. But as an eye-witness, let me describe that battle. The rebels held the vantage-ground, for they were in position with artillery planted and men in line, waiting for the yankees. From where their first artillery was planted to our gate was not more than two hundred and fifty yards. It is now about noon; the yankees, I see them coming, bayonets glistening in the autumnal sun. They are nearing the rebel line, coming within range of their larger guns.

They cross Mr. Whipp’s field of recently planted wheat; they are now behind the stone fence. As they scale it, the command is given to the rebels to “fire.” It seemed as if heaven and earth had collided.

The battle now begins in earnest; and nothing is heard but the incessant pop, pop, of the musket, and the boom of the cannon. The yells and shouts of the men are as deafening as the reports of their weapons. The yankees charge, but the rebel line stand firm. Balls fly in all directions, one enters our house and imbed itself in the wall; for safety we repair to the cellar. The firing subsides, father and sister go out in the yard to “reconnoitre.”

A rebel cavalier passing by sees them; maddened by the fact that the battle is almost lost to them, he aims a pistol at father, pulls the trigger, but the weapon misses fire. Three times he aims and pulls the trigger, each time it only snaps and refuses to kill “God’s anointed.” With an oath he rides on.

Again the firing begins and the fight “waxes warm.” The pop, pop, pop of the muskets, inter-mingled with the sullen boom, boom of the cannon.

Ah, but look, the cavalry are now engaged, we see them directly in front of our cellar window. Look at those splendid chargers on which the Union cavalry ride. See their distended nostrils; they smell the battle, they paw, they snort, their very "necks seem clothed with thunder." The Confederate cavalry gives way before the fearful charge.

For six consecutive hours the battle rages; the rebel infantry have yielded only a little. The command is given to the Union soldiers to "advance, double-quick and sweep the field with the bayonet." This is too much for the "Johnnies;" they run like sheep over the mountain, leaving their dead and wounded behind. The Unions have gained the victory, but it is a dear one. Hundreds of the "boys in blue" lie dead and dying.

It is now dark; we come up out of our uncomfortable quarters and breathe more freely. None of the family slept that night, except the writer, who was too young to realize the danger through which we had just passed, and who thought the whole thing was simply "immense."

Next morning, September 15th, old Sol arose in all his splendor. Father took us out on the battle field, the sights of which are now vividly portrayed in my mind, although at the time I was only five years old.

The dead and dying lay, as "thick as leaves," upon the ground. Union and rebel, side by side, in the embrace of death. The features of some were pleasant; of others, intense agony was depicted on every lineament of their countenances. A leg here, an arm there; a head here, a foot yonder. Horrible! horrible!

The young man whom I have alluded to, was lying on the side of the public road, with a hole in his head, into which you could put your fist. "That is he," said father. "Yes," said mother, "he died in Maryland." It took several days to bury the dead.

On the 17th of September the great battle of Antietam was fought. We visited that battlefield also but I cannot give a description of it. It was one of the bloodiest battles of the civil war. The Federal soldiers were around about there for quite awhile. The home church was taken for a hospital, and there were no religious services held in it for some time.

Father "weathered it out" until Conference, which met April 1863 in Baltimore, Md., Bishop Payne presiding. His report to this Conference was, necessarily, a poor one. At the rise of the Conference he was sent to the Ellicott's Mills Circuit.