

FIGHTING BATTLES

Of Bygone Days--Reminiscences of the Sixties. The Paper Prepared
by Mr. Joseph L. Pollard

To the Wright-Latane Camp:

Fellow Comrades--The request comes to me through our Brother Beale from you, that I must again take up my pen to finish up the occurrences around Petersburg, in the memorable seige of that city. I have already given you two papers, bringing down the events that occurred from the landing of Grant's army at City Point to the famous battle of the Crater. I can but feel flattered by your request, and should have complied sonner, but the weather has been so intensely hot, and I have felt weak and feeble and not much like writing. This is my only excuse.

After the enemy had been foiled, and beaten at the Crater, Grant busied himself in strengthening his position, in building up his earth-works and mounting his heavy guns.

Nor did the confederates lie idle. Their ditches were dug and made stronger, their cannon were placed on every commanding position, and their mortar batteries were strung along the line wherever it was most appropriate.

Thus the two armies confronted each other, Grant not risking an attack, and our army watching his every move. It may be well here to say something of our life in the trenches, how we lived and what dangers we encountered. A great ditch was dug many miles in length extending from the Appomattox River, around Petersburg on the south to Hatcher's Run, some ten miles to the right of the city. This long stretch of ditch had to be guarded, and the troops had to live in it.

So we had our little fly tents and bomb proofs fixed up all along this line of ditch, to protect us from the weather and the shells of the opposing batteries. We had covered ways, they were ditches too, cut to the rear that the men might go backward to Petersburg when necessity required. These were indispensable, for the picket firing was so sharp and constant that no life was safe outside of these ditches.

Thus we lived under constant fire from the pickets and sharp shooters and nightly visits from mortar shell, for the enemy seemed to select the night mostly for this kind of work.

*Copied from the Tidewater Democrat, Tappahannock, Va
Jan 25, 1901*

THE BATTLE OF PETERSBURG

of the... by...

To the...

I have already given you two papers, but the events that occurred from the landing of Grant's army at City Point to the famous battle of the Crater, I can best illustrate by your request, and should have done so long ago, but the weather has been so intensely hot, and I have felt weak and feeble and at times like writing. This is my only excuse.

After the enemy had been killed, and driven from the Crater, Grant placed himself in a position to attack the enemy's works and to capture the heavy guns.

For did the Confederates the hole, their mines were dry, and made stronger, their cannon were placed on every commanding position, and their mortar batteries were strong along the line wherever it was most appropriate.

Thus the two armies confronted each other, Grant not making an attack, and our army waiting for the attack. It may be well here to say something of our life in the trenches, how we lived and what dangers we encountered. A great trench was dug across the front extending from the Appomattox River, around Petersburg on the south to Hancock's Line, some ten miles to the front of the city. This long stretch of ditch had to be guarded, and the troops had to live in it.

So we had our little huts and some more fixed up all along this line of ditch, to protect us from the weather and the shells of the opposing batteries. We had covered ways, they were ditches too, out to the rear that the men might go down and in a storm when necessary required. These were the holes, and the holes were necessary, and constant that the life was safe outside of these ditches.

And we lived under constant fire from the rifles and sharpshooters and snipers from the mortar shells, for the enemy seemed to select the night for the kind of work.

Can I describe so that the rising generation may have an idea what horrors we encountered from the mortar shells? I am afraid not. The mortar was a short cannon that threw its shell up in the air at such an angle that it would fall just about where the cannoneer wished it to fall. And these cannoneers became so skillful and well practiced that they could soon get the range they wanted, and pitch their shells right in the ditch where we were. We had no means of defense and had literally to stand and take them. In this way a great many men were killed and wounded and they feared nothing so much as the mortar shells.

Thus we lived through the summer of '64, harassed day and night by the constant fire and every now and then seeing a comrade shot down by a minnie ball or terribly mangled by a mortar shell.

In the meantime Grant continued to extend his line to our right-- he seized hold on the Weldon Road running down through North Carolina and held it so tenaciously that General Lee was unable to dislodge him.

Now only one road was left for Lee to provision his army with.

Grant built him too a railroad from City Point along his line to provision his army and reinforce it whenever occasion required. Thus all through the summer he was strengthening his position and getting ready for the great encounter.

Winter came upon us, and as we had stood the scorching heat of the sun, we now had to contend with the rigors of winter; the snow and the rain came and flooded the trenches making the mud and slush almost unbearable. I have known the water and mud nearly knee deep in those trenches, still we had to wade through it, for it was nearly instant death to show ourselves outside the trenches. In fact the state of things got so desperate--both for the Confederate and the Yankee as well--that the pickets on both sides made a compact that they would not fire at each other, that there should be no firing. It was then we felt greatly relieved, as we could show ourselves anywhere with no fear of being shot at, and when our pickets would come in in the morning and say boys, there will be no firing today, we could walk where we chose.

In the mean time an effort was made to make peace between the North and South and three commissioners were sent to meet Mr. Lincoln at City Point. These commissioners passed across our lines just where

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In the meantime an effort was made to make peace between the North and South and three commissioners were sent to meet Mr. Lincoln at City Point. These commissioners passed across our lines just where

our company was stationed, and for the first and only time I saw Alex Stephens the great statesman. The men thought that now peace would surely come and they would soon go to their homes.

You may guess their disappointment when it was announced that the whole peace move had failed, that Jeff Davis would consider nothing short of southern independence. The men were so disheartened that numbers deserted thereby greatly weakening Gen Lee's army. So we had to go back to killing and shooting each other, and to our miserable life in the trenches, until about the middle of March '65 when great events commenced to cast their shadows before.

About this time we could see their trains loaded down with troops moving to our right. The inference was thus forced upon our minds that Grant was massing large numbers of troops on our right flank, and that there the final blow would be struck.

March was now hastening to its end, when our division (Bushrod Johnson's) was ordered to leave the trenches and occupy the cabins used by General Gordon's men as their winter quarters, some nine or ten miles to the right of Petersburg. Gordon's men were to take our places in the trenches. Lee had determined to cut the line of Grant near Hare's House, and entrusted Gordon with its execution. But Gordon was driven back after he had pierced the enemy's line with great loss and had to retire to the trenches.

Thus being relieved of any trouble in this quarter, for General Lee had attempted to cut his army in twain, Grant commenced his move in our front, which brought on the affair at Burgess' Mill where we were obstinately engaged. After feeling the strength of the enemy we were drawn off and ordered back to the trenches.

The next day we did some skirmishing, but no heavy fighting near Hatcher's Run in which all our company was captured, except myself and six men. After we had fallen back to our trenches Major Perrin came down the line inquiring for Sergeant Pollard. He told me that Capt. Smith had been shot down in the pines to our front, and I must go out and take command of the men he had with him. I shouldered my rifle, mounted the bank and walked straight out to where Capt. Smith lay; not a gun was fired at me, though I was in full view of the enemy's pickets. I found the Captain lying on a stretcher very much hurt, but not mortally wounded as he thought. The next day there was no fighting for a scout came in and informed us that the enemy had left our front, and were nowhere to be seen. But we heard heavy firing to our right, and now Picket is attacked at Five Works and driven from the field.

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myself and six men. After we had fallen back to our trenches Major
Perry came down the line looking for Sergeant Holland. He told me
that Capt. Smith had been shot down in the lines to our front, and I
went to get another command of the men he had with him. I shouldered
my rifle, mounted the bank and walked straight out to where Capt. Smith
lay. Not a gun was fired at me, though I was in full view of the enemy's
lines. I found the Captain lying on a stretcher very much hurt, but
not mortally wounded as he thought. The next day there was no fighting
for a short time. I saw a report that the enemy had left our front,
and were to have to be sent. But we heard heavy firing to our right,
and now I felt it attached at five o'clock and driven from the field.

Our division is now moved to reinforce Picket and stop the advance of the enemy. But Picket and his men were nowhere to be seen, and I have never heard what became of them. The enemy had now our last railroad, and Gen. Lee's retreat commenced. Our route was to Farmville, but before reaching that town, we had many encounters with Sheridan's cavalry. We held them in check, during the day, skirmishing with them, and charging them off the roads at points where they would make a stand, then we would march all night to catch up with our retreating army. We had a very severe encounter at a place called Sayer's Creek, when our division was nearly surrounded, and When Gen. Johnson ran away and reported to Gen. Lee that his whole division had been captured.

Sheridan hovered around our flanks pressing us to the utmost, thereby throwing our men in disorder. It was there Gen. Wise came on foot among us for his horse had been carried away by his son Dick and said: "Men stand by me and I will carry you out," We told him that was our intention and he did carry us out, and that night we arrived at the High Bridge at Farmville. We crossed over during the night and the next morning as we made the hills overlooking the town I saw Gen. Lee sitting on his horse watching our division as it filed past him. It was here we got our last rations, and I heard the order "Johnson's division in front." We had been in the rear all the time fighting Sheridan off the retreating army. Now we must take the front. Our course was the road to Appomatox C. H. which place we reached in the evening of the 8th of April. We were told we could cook some of the rations we had gotten at Farmville, and went about to prepare something to eat for we were nearly starved. While these preparations were going on a man rode up and inquired for Sergeant Pollard. It turned out to be Thos. E. Henshaw, who wished to know if I were safe, well captain he said I should never have known you, starvation had gotten the best of me. We had hardly gotten a mouthful to eat when orders came "Johnson's division in line of battle". We were quickly thrown into line and as night came on we laid down on the ground in line of battle to await the development of the next day. By early morn on the memorable 9th of April (who will ever forget that day) we were marched under the hills a little above the town and formed in a line of battle ready for the charge now to be made. The enemy's cannon was on the road above the town and this we had to charge and take. Up the hill we went, across the field at a run, drove the cannoneers away and sieged the cannon. We had not proceeded far across the field when orders came for us to fall back. General Lee had surrendered. Yes the great drama is ended, the scene is finished, the curtain falls, the Army of the Northern Va., goes down before overwhelming numbers and Lee the Hector of the Southern army lays down his sword. As Hector was God like as described by Homer when he led his Trojans to battle; so Lee was the embodiment of all that is grand and noble and God-like.

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advance of the enemy. But first and his men were ordered to be
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now our last railroad, and Gen. Lee's retreat commenced. Our route
was to Knoxville, but before reaching that town, we had nearly our
counters with Johnston's cavalry. We held them in check during the
day, exchanging with them, and changing them off the road at points
where they would make a stand, and we would march all night to
catch up with our regular army. The night very severe and
at a place called Beaver Creek, when our division was nearly
surrounded, and Gen. Lee's army and reported to Gen. Lee
that his whole division had been captured.

Johnston hovered around our flank pressing us to the attack,
thereby throwing our men in disorder. It was there that I saw
him not among us for the first time and he had been carried away by his own
and said: "Men, stand by me and I will carry you out, and that night we
that was our intention and he did carry us out, and that night we
arrived at the Mill Bridge in Knoxville. We crossed over during the
night and the next morning as we made the hills overlooking the town.
I saw Gen. Lee sitting on his horse watching our division as it filed
past him. It was here we got our first alarm, and I was in the order
"Johnston's division in front." We had been in the rear in the first
fighting position of the retreating army. Now we must take the front.
Our course was the road to Artillery Hill, which place we reached
in the evening of the 6th of April. We were told we could cook some
of the rations we had gotten at Knoxville, and went about in the
something to eat for we were very hungry. While these matters
were going on a messenger came and told me that Gen. Lee had
turned out to be late. I, however, who wished to know if I were safe,
well captured he said I should never have known you, as you had
gotten the best of me. He had hardly gotten a moment to eat when
orders came Johnston's division in line of battle. We were ordered
through into line and a great many of us fell down on the ground in
line of battle to await the development of the next day. My early march
on the 6th of April (the 11th) will ever be remembered. We were
marched under the hills. Little above the town and turned in a line of
battle ready for the charge to take place. The enemy's column was
on the road above the town and had to charge and take. On the
hill we went across the field in front, above the cannon's way and
beyond the cannon. We had not proceeded far across the field when
orders came for us to fall back. Gen. Lee had surrendered. Yes,
the first time he called, the scene is finished, the brilliant
Army of the North is now a defeated army. The day is over. As
and Lee the factor of the Southern army lay down his sword. As
factor was Gen. Lee as he had been by Johnston when he had his
to battle; so Lee was the only element of all that is grand and noble
and noble.

Yes the Southern Sun set on the hills of Appomattox, and as it went down it threw a halo of glory in effaceable around the army of Northern Virginia and around the name of Gen. Lee.

And now, my friends, my narrative is finished, your writer passed through many dangers, he can boast that he was in every engagement his company went into, and above all that he was in the last charge on the heights of Appomattox.

Very Respectfully,

Jos. L. Pollard

1st Serg't Co I 26 Va.

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And now, my friends, my narrative is finished, your witness
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engagement his country wanted, and above all that he was in the
last charge on the hills of Appomattox.

Very Respectfully,

John A. Rollins

1st Corp's Col & Lt