The Battle of the Crater

The old Romans had a temple dedicated to war. In times of peace the doors of this temple were shut, in time of war the doors were stretched wide open. And as the Romans were a warlike people, the doors were oftener open than shut. Figuratively the door to our temple of war was shut at Appomattox when we stacked arms before the Union army, and gave up for good the Cause of the South. And yet the war in remembrance is not over, it will never cease while the old soldier lives, while he can fight over its battles mentally, and so long as he can tell to his children and his grand children the memorable days. There is a longing desire among all classes of the people to hear of the tragic events of those days, and hence I am here to tell you about the Crater, what I saw and what we did.

Grant's advance had received such a crushing blow on the 17th of June 1864, that he made no other serious attack. Gen Lee's army had come to our help and taken its position on the line staked off by Beauregard. and both armies went ditching. Beauregard had been sent to a distant field. Gen Lee took command in person, and Wise's Brigade had been merged into the great army of Northern Virginia. The trenches were dug in front of Petersburg, and batteries had been planted on every hill top, and at every point where cannon was needed. Forts had been built along the stretch of ditch, the fortications had been as strong as military science could make them, the enemy on the opposite hills had done the same, and now the city of Petersburg is beseiged by a powerful army under Grant himself, while the Southern army lay in its trenches watching its opportunity. Mortar batteries had been established at every convenient point on both sides, and often have I seen the duel between opposing batteries as they would hurl their fiery missiles over our heads. We had become acquainted with the mortar shells, for they would sometimes fall in close proximity to us.

The trenches were our home, we lived in them, bearing the heat of summer and the cold and mud of winter. We had nothing but routine duty to do now, sending out pickets at the dusk of evening, and relieving them in the morning before the light of day. Now and then a man would be picked off by a sharpshooter and killed, for sharpshooting was going on day and night. We were under constant fire. Now and then there would be an alarm, then the muskets would rattle, as a real battle was progressing, but it would be only an alarm.

Grant did not dare to rush upon our works, for we were fortified in front and in rear. So some other means must be adopted to reach Petersburg.

Ine all womans had a temple dedicated to war. In times of peace the acors of inic temple were smot, in time of war the acors were saretched will one. And is the house, were a warfine people, the doors were climeter opening and. I ignitatively the door to our cample of war was shut at appearance attor. Then we stack of the stack of arms before income and, and over the fer your time can be one of the sent.

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So as we lay one hot summer day, sweltering in the trenches, there came along some men with long poles in their hands, and at the ends of these poles were iron fixments so adjusted that when thrust on the ground, they would dig holes something like a post digger used for putting in posts for fences. We asked them what they were doing? An. said they, have you heard? Grant is mining and we are trying to find out where he is mining at. One of these mornings you may find yourself flying up in the air between heaven and earth; not a pleasant sensation we bet. We laughed at them and they went their way. So grant was trying to reach Petersburg under the ground.

Not far from old Blandford Cemetary, say about half a mile, or more, the hills runs boldly out, and on this hill we had a battery of four cannon that commanded the Yankee position in front. It was a very strong position and the enemy had advanced their picket line across the little stream that separated the opposing hills. Here our line of defence made an obtuse angle, and in this angle were mounted the four cannon above referred to.

Back of this angle ran a plateau to a rivine say two hundred yards across. This was the battery the Yankee's had fixed upon to "blow up, and the plateau was to be the battle ground. On the hill next to the right was another battery say two or three hundred yards distant. This battery contained, I think only one cannon. Now you have the ground laid off on which the struggle was to be made. The enemy dug a passage under the ground from their picket post to this battery of four cannon, walled it up so that it could not cave in, and right under the battery put tons of powder, we have never known how much.

The month of July of that year of "64" had come with its long hot days, and the heat of the sun in these trenches was almost unbearable, but we had to bear everything for our Country's sake. The month dragged slowly along, and when it had nearly run its course, on the 29th' Wise's Brigade was moved and so stationed that the 26th Regiment occupied a portion of the ground between the two batteries I have described. Hence we held a position in full view of what was soon to happen. Grant had made a diversion towards Richmond, and to meet it Lee had to take some of his troops out the trenches, and thus we had to take their places.

The morning of the 30th of July, between the break of day and sunrise, I lay fast asleep on a plank at the bottom of the ditch, when I was startled by a sudden quaking of the earth, and by the cry of one of our company;

along some welly one had eminy poles in their named, and at the cases, these streng some well in a rith long poles in their named, and at the case of these pares wells incoming the strength of the case of the ground, they world divide the properties and the ground, they world divide the samething like a post divide the partitions. And said they, have for reach a said they, have the heart of the second and we are their to that our value of a minimal of these are their may and a said they are not a minimal at a first the second and said the said the second and control of the second and control of the second and control of the second as a standard of the second and the second

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look Grant has blown up our works. I jumped to my feet and saw a great cloud of black smoke hovering in the air above, great masses of earth blown up, and men going up with arms and legs extended. The long expected event had come, the mine had been sprung, and the city of Petersburg was shaken as by a mighty earth quake. The smoke had hardly lifted itself away, before Burnsides Corps fifteen thousand strong, negro troops in front rushed upon and took possession of the ground. And now every battery on the opposing hills opened fire, cannon shot swept the field, and mortar shells dropped thick and fast around us. I can best describe the scene in the language of the poet Campbell....

Then shook the hills with thunder riv^tn And louder than the bots of Heav^tn Far flashed the red artillery.

The 26th stood firm as a rock and we shot volley after volley, but the distance was too great, our balls fell short and our men farther to our left called to us to cease firing that the bullets were falling among them. At this juncture our ammunition commenced to run low, and Capt. Smith ordered me to go in search of Capt. Street, who was in command of the Regiment, and report our want of ammunition. I pulled off my cartrige box containing 40 rounds and said to the men, use mine until I come back, but I hardly expected ever to return. I found Capt. Street and reported our situation. He remarked that cartridges would soon be in and directly George Spencer came luggin in the ammunition. Three Companies of South Carolinians had been blown up, the battery on our right had been deserted by a cowardly Lieutenant and his men when the explosion took place. They expected to be blown up also, and had run off to Petersburg. But Capt. Bagby of the 24th came to the rescue, manned the gun and worked it with great success.

The enemy attempted to proceed towards Petersburg. The formed line and made a start, but they had not proceeded very far before we saw them running back with necks extended like so many wild turkeys. We judged they met something in the ravine they did not fancy. Nothing farther could be done, we must hold our own, we must keep the enemy confined to the ground he had taken until assistance came.

But the deafening noize, the shrieking shells, the bursting mortar shells, the whizzing minnie balls, they must be endured until our troops could come to the rescue. I heard of but one cowardly act, that of the Lieutenant. Every man amongst us as the enemy expected. Gen Lee had sent us word down the line re-enforcements were coming. "Hold your own men" was the order. And nobly they did it.

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It must be evening now, for old Meredith has crawled in through shot and shell and brought Capt. Smith his dinner. A faithful old darkey he must have been to bring his master his dinner whilst a battle is in progress. But he came and Capt. Smith did not have to go hungry. was no dinner for us, we had no time to devote to our stomachs. We looked over the field but could see no aid approaching. Presently we heard a shout in the distance. Did you ever hear the rebel yell? Ah: you should have heard that, it made the blood leap in our veins, it armed us with redoubled courage. Look men, our Brigade rushes to the charge. Then another shout went up louder than the first, and a second Brigade moves at a double quick across the plateau. It reached its place and aligns itself on the right of the first. Another yell like the demons were turned loose, and a third Brigade issues from the ravine nearer to us, and sweeps across the plateau at a run-then every Yankee battery belched forth its thunder, every mortar sent its shell shrieking through the air, bullets floew, but these men rushes to the charge, not counting the danger, every man a hero, and closed in on the enemy. Oh: it was a grand sight to look upon that desperate charge. Braver men never went into battle. Well might General Lee say to Sir Garnett Wolsey when remarking on the sorry appearance of his men. Sir you should see them go into battle. And I say to you, my friends, you should have seen these men go into battle. When the shout was raised we could see the Yankees streaming back to their works -- they knew what was coming. We closed to the left to make the connection with the charging force, and by one supreme effort the works were carried and victory pearched upon the Southern banner. I asked what troops they were, they told me that they were Georgians of Mahones division. Brave Georgians: Not the charge Murat on the sandy plains of Egypt, not the charge of the English at Balaklava, not the charge of Picket at Getysburg could surpass this in brilliancy and splendid courage.

This closed the fighting, night came on and every gun was silent, not even the accoustomed sharpshooting went on. The next morning a flag of truce was sent in by the enemy asking the permission to burry their dead. Of course it was granted, and then we had an opportunity to look over the field and to visit the great hole that had been made by the explosion of the powder. We found the space in front of our works all strewn over with dead, mostly negros who had been slain in the attact bringing to mind the words of the same poet,

Ah: few shall part where many meet, And every turf beneath their feet Shall be a soldier's sepulchre.

It was a round hole of considerable depth, resembling the crater of a volcano, hence its name. It is said that ten thousand men were lost on both sides in this battle, about an equal number on each side, with no benefit to the attacking party. And now, my friends, I would say in

It must be evening now, for old Meredith has onewied in thrown and and shell and browns about Smith bis dinoer. A delinful ord darley he -or, and best to being big master his diamet whilst eventie is an areeress. But he deme and Capt. Smith did not have to go hungry. There was no dissertor was, we had no tune to devote to our stonkens. Wehanked over the field out could see no bid sembaching. Lenesentin we the will a chould the distance. Did you ever hear the rebel yell Ant you should have neard that, it made the brood less in more veine, it strated was with rede teled courage. Inch wan, our Britada rushes to the charge. Then soother shear went on louder than the first, and a second Brigade moves at a double quick-across the plateau. It reas $oldsymbol{y}$ ed its place and digned itself on the crimit of the first, Another yell like the day one were timed lose, and a third Baiga a issues it on the tartie mearer to proand ones a sorner the fittern at a pan-then every Tankes battery usioned forth its thander, every thought sent the Shell shreeking through the air, builets finew, and there in an ruenes to the on weap, not counting the danger, every man a bern, and closed in on the coery, win: it was a grand sight to look upon that desperate charge. Erayer has never ment that but catile. Well might General Lane say to Sir Sarnett Wolsey when remaining up the soury appearance of his men. Kir you should see tham to into battle, And I say to you, my friends, you should have seen tasse mor no into buttle. Vent the short was raised we could see the Wellies a streaming oned to their works-they knew what was coming. We closed to the left to make the connection with the chiry force, and by one ever eme effort the works were can bed and victory jear and upon the Southern backer, asked what troops they wate, they told me that they were Georgian to be wanted as a winter a work on the saudy diame of Egypt, not the charge of the Wignish at Balanave, not the charge of Fichet at Cetysburg sould ampass this in brillians, and splantin convers.

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It was a round note of considerable depth, resembling the eraser of a volcame, hence its attached, that this said that thousand men were now of coth sides in this patitle, about in equal announces on each side, with moderation to the attaching only. And now, to, friends, I would say in

conclusion that I would like to see a monument erected on this very spot with this inscription on it. To the brave men who fought the battle of the Crater.

The above article on the Battle of the Crater was written by Captain Joseph L. Pollard and published in Tidewater Democrat Friday July 30th, 1897, thirty three years after the battle. o not sion that I yould like to see a continent erected on this very kpot with this inscription on it. To the brave then who rought the pattle of the Grater.

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