



UNION PICKET POST IN FRONT OF FORT SEDGWICK AND FACING FORT MAHONE.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE CRATER.



PROBABLY at no other time during the war was there a better opportunity for a successful operation than at the springing of the mine in front of Petersburg, July 30th, 1864. While many think that the failure

on that occasion was attributable to the weakness of General Ledlie and his division, it would appear, when all the circumstances are considered, that all the blame cannot be laid at their door.

The first attempt to capture Petersburg was made on June 10th, a few days after the repulse at Cold Harbor. General Butler, who confronted Beauregard at Bermuda Hundred, on the previous day sent General Gillmore with 3000 infantry, and General Kautz with 1500 cavalry, to surprise General Wise, who held the Petersburg defenses with his brigade and a small force of militia. Early on June 10th Gillmore found the intrenchments east of the town fully manned and withdrew. Kautz approached Petersburg from the south-east, flanked the intrenchments at the Jerusalem plank-road, and advanced to the city reservoir (see map, page 765) where a show of force was made which decided General Kautz to withdraw. During the day Wise was reënforced by Dearing's brigade of cavalry.

On the evening of June 12th began Meade's movement from Cold Harbor to the James. The Fifth Corps, crossing the Chickahominy at Long Bridge, took a position to cover the White Oak Bridge and the roads from Richmond, between White Oak Swamp and Malvern Hill. On the 13th the Second Corps

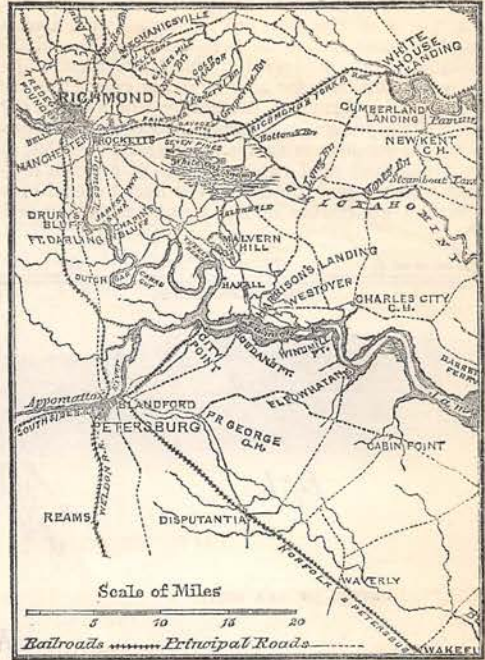
passed through Charles City Court House and reached the James below Wilcox's Landing. The Sixth and Ninth corps arrived there on the 14th. The Second Corps crossed in boats from Wilcox's Landing during the night of June 14th, the day that the Fifth reached Charles City Court House. On the 15th and 16th the three other corps crossed by a ponton-bridge, touching the south bank 2 miles north of Fort Powhatan, where the river was 2100 feet wide.

General W. F. Smith embarked the Eighteenth Corps at White House, June 13th, and arrived at Point of Rocks during the night of the 14th. The next morning General Smith advanced on Petersburg with 16,000 men. Late on the 15th he assaulted the outer line of works and carried them from redans 5 to 11 (see map, page 765). During the night Lee reënforced Wise with Hoke's division and a part of Edward Johnson's division. Early the same evening Hancock's Second Corps came to the assistance of General Smith. On the 16th the Ninth Corps arrived and took position on the left of the Second Corps. Early on that day Egan's brigade captured redan 12; later, the Second Corps, assisted by two brigades of the Eighteenth Corps on the right and a similar force of the Ninth on the left, captured redans 4, 13, and 14. At dawn on the 17th General Potter's division of the Ninth Corps carried the enemy's line for a mile south of redan 14. During the night Beauregard withdrew to a new line, which was immediately intrenched, and reënforcements from General Lee began to pour in. On the 18th assaults were made by the Second, Ninth, and Fifth corps, in that order counting from the Hare house, afterward Fort Stedman, toward the left.

The Ninth Army Corps, under General Burnside, gained by these last assaults an advanced position beyond a deep cut in the railroad within one hundred and thirty yards of the enemy's main lines. In rear of that advanced position was a deep hollow, where work could be carried on entirely out of sight of the enemy.

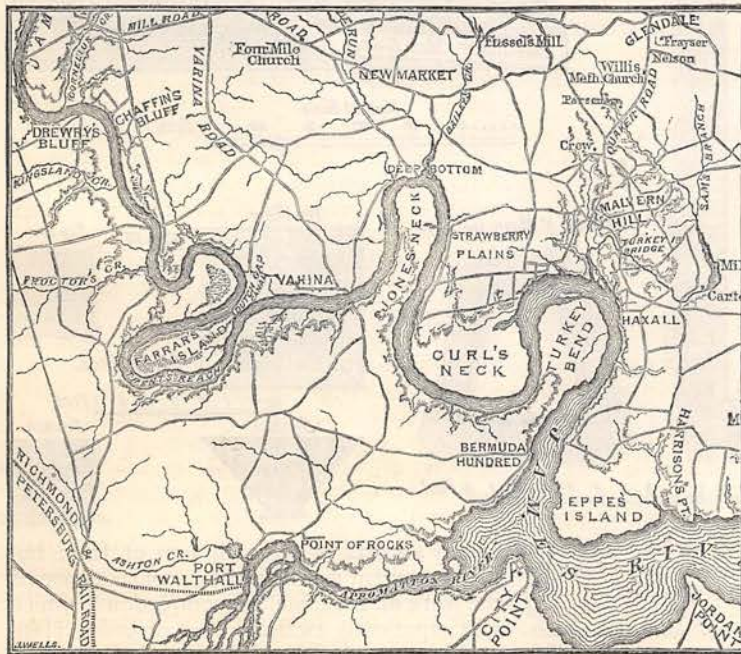
A few days after gaining this position Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Pleasants, who had been a mining engineer and who belonged to the 48th Pennsylvania Volunteers, composed for the most part of miners from the upper Schuylkill coal region, suggested to General Potter, commander of the Second Division of the Ninth Corps, the possibility of running a mine under one of the enemy's forts in front of the deep hollow. This proposition was submitted to General Burnside, who approved of the measure, and work was commenced upon it on the 25th of June. If ever a man labored under disadvantages, that man was Colonel Pleasants. In his testimony before the Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War, he said :

"The work was commenced at 12 o'clock noon, on the twenty-fifth day of June, 1864. I saw General Burnside the night previous, and commenced the mine right off the next day. . . . My regiment was only about four hundred strong. At first I employed but a few men at a time, but the number was increased as the work progressed, until at last I had to use the whole regiment—non-commissioned officers and all. The great difficulty



MAP OF THE REGION BETWEEN COLD HARBOR AND PETERSBURG.

I had was to dispose of the material got out of the mine. I found it impossible to get any assistance from anybody; I had to do all the work myself. I had to remove



MAP OF DEEP BOTTOM AND BERMUDA HUNDRED.

General Butler's lines extended from Port Walthall on the Appomattox to the western end of Farnham's Island on the James. There was a ponton-bridge connecting Deep Bottom with Jones's Neck, and two bridges connecting Point of Rocks with the south bank of the Appomattox. These facilitated the transfer of troops from Petersburg to Deep Bottom and back again, by which movement a part of Lee's force was drawn from Petersburg preliminary to the Union assault at the crater.—EDITOR.

all the earth in old cracker-boxes; I got pieces of hickory and nailed on the boxes in which we received our crackers, and then ironclad them with hoops of iron taken from old pork and beef barrels. . . . Whenever I made application I could not get anything, although General Burnside was very favorable to it. The most important thing was to ascertain how far I had to mine, because if I fell short of or went beyond the proper place, the explosion would have no practical effect. Therefore I wanted an accurate instrument with which to make the necessary triangulations. I had to make them on the furthest front line, where the enemy's sharpshooters could reach me. I could not get the instrument I wanted, although there was one at army headquarters, and General Burnside had to send to Washington and get an old-fashioned theodolite, which was given to me. . . . General Burnside told me that General Meade and Major Duane, chief engineer of the Army

of the Potomac, said the thing could not be done — that it was all clap-trap and nonsense; that such a length of mine had never been excavated in military operations, and could not be; that I would either get the men smothered, for want of air, or crushed by the falling of the earth; or the enemy would find it out and it would amount to nothing. I could get no boards or lumber supplied to me for my operations. I had to get a pass and send two companies of my own regiment, with wagons, outside of our lines to rebel saw-mills, and get lumber in that way, after having pre-

the powder on the 23d of July, 1864. With proper tools and instruments it could have been done in one-third or one-fourth of the time. The greatest delay was occasioned by taking the material out, which had to be carried the whole length of the gallery. Every night the pioneers of Colonel Pleasants' regiment had to cut bushes to cover the fresh dirt at the mouth of the gallery; otherwise the enemy could have observed it from trees inside his own lines.

The main gallery was 510⁸/₁₀ feet in length. The left lateral gallery was 37 feet in length and the right lateral 38 feet. The magazines, 8 in number, were placed in the lateral galleries — 2 at each end a few feet apart in branches at nearly right angles to the side galleries, and 2 more in each of the side galleries similarly placed by pairs, situated equidistant from each other and the end of the galleries.

It had been the intention of General Grant to make an assault on the

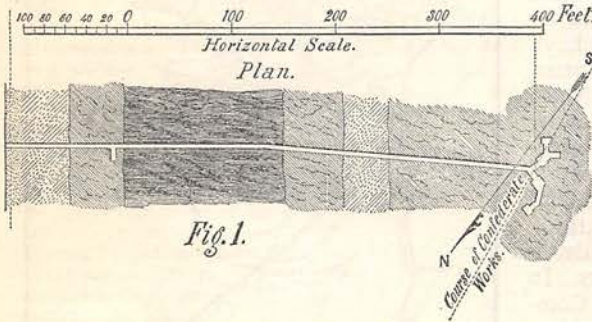
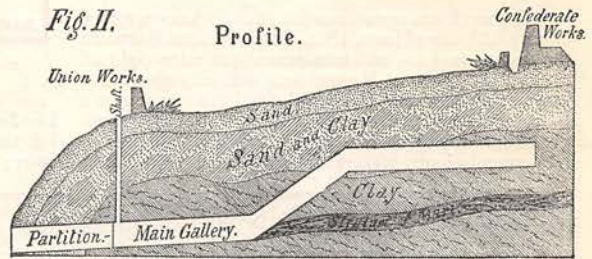


Fig. 1.

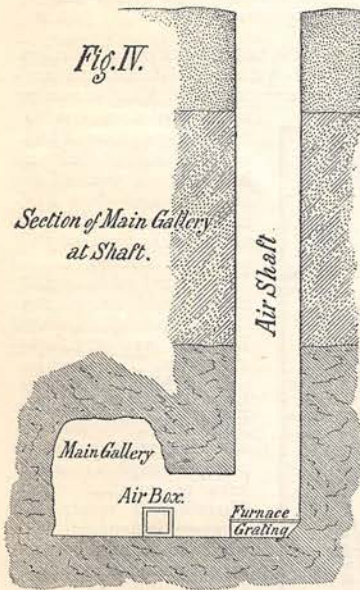
DETAILS OF THE MINE.

Fig. II.

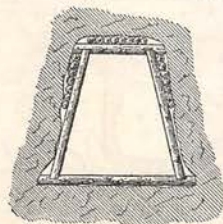
Profile.



Vertical Scale. 0 10 20 30 40 50 Feet.



Section of Main Gallery.



Top View

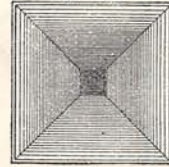


Fig. III.

Top View



Magazines.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 Feet.

Section



Section



viously got what lumber I could by tearing down an old bridge. I had no mining picks furnished me, but had to take common army picks and have them straightened for my mining picks. . . . The only officers of high rank, so far as I learned, that favored the enterprise was General Burnside, the corps commander, and General Potter, the division commander."

Notwithstanding the adverse circumstances at the outset, Colonel Pleasants had the whole mine, lateral galleries and all, ready to put in

enemy's works in the early part of July; but the movement was deferred in consequence of the work on the mine, the completion of which was impatiently awaited. As a diversion Hancock's corps and two divisions of cavalry had crossed to the north side of the James at Deep Bottom and had threatened Richmond. A part of Lee's army was sent from Petersburg to checkmate this move, and when the mine was

ready to be sprung Hancock was recalled in haste to Petersburg. When the mine was ready for the explosives General Meade requested General Burnside to submit a plan of attack. This was done in a letter dated July 26th, 1864, in which General Burnside said:

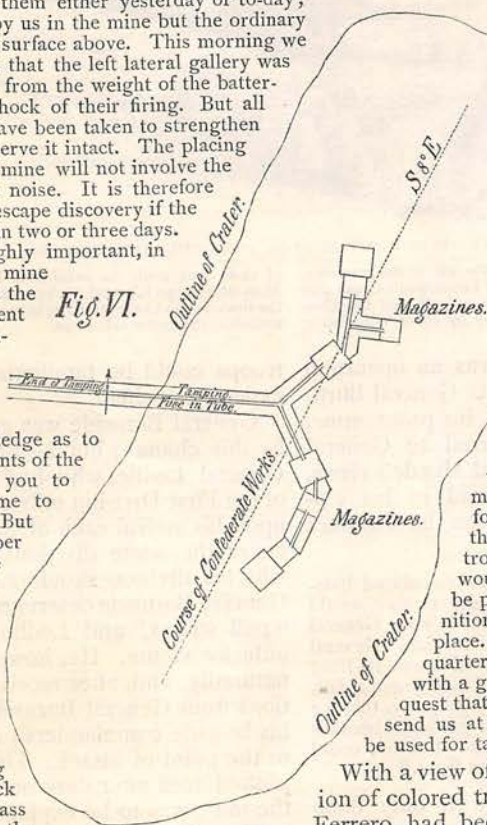
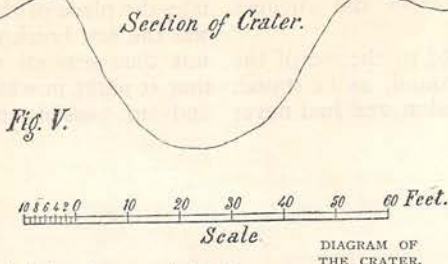
"... It is altogether probable that the enemy are cognizant of the fact that we are mining, because it is mentioned in their papers, and they have been heard at work on what are supposed to be shafts in close proximity to our galleries. But the rain of night before last has, no doubt, much retarded their work. We have heard no sound of workmen in them either yesterday or to-day; and nothing is heard by us in the mine but the ordinary sounds of work on the surface above. This morning we had some apprehension that the left lateral gallery was in danger of caving in from the weight of the batteries above it and the shock of their firing. But all possible precautions have been taken to strengthen it, and we hope to preserve it intact. The placing of the charges in the mine will not involve the necessity of making a noise. It is therefore probable that we will escape discovery if the mine is to be used within two or three days. It is, nevertheless, highly important, in my opinion, that the mine should be exploded at the earliest possible moment consistent with the general interests of the campaign. I state to you the facts, as nearly as I can, and in the absence of any knowledge as to the meditated movements of the army, I must leave you to judge the proper time to make use of the mine. But it may not be improper for me to say that the advantages reaped from the work would be but small if it were exploded without any cooperative movement.

"My plan would be to explode the mine just before daylight in the morning or at about five o'clock in the afternoon. Mass the two brigades of the colored division in rear of my first line, in columns of division,—double-columns closed in mass,—the head of each brigade resting on the front line, and as soon as the explosion has taken place, move them forward, with instructions for the division to take half distance, and as soon as the leading regiments of the two brigades pass through the gap in the enemy's line, the leading regiment of the right brigade to come into line perpendicular

to the enemy's line by the 'right companies on the right into line, wheel,' the left companies on the right into line, and proceed at once down the line of the enemy's works as rapidly as possible; and the leading regiment of the left brigade to execute the reverse movement to the left, moving up the enemy's line. The remainder of the columns to move directly towards the crest in front as rapidly as possible, diverging in such a way as to enable them to deploy into column of regiments, the right column making as nearly as possible for Cemetery Hill; these columns to be followed by the other divisions of the corps as soon as they can be thrown in. This would involve the necessity of relieving these divisions by other troops before the movement, and of holding columns of other troops in readiness to take our place on the crest, in case we gain it, and sweep down it. It would, in my opinion, be advisable, if we succeed in gaining the crest, to throw the colored division right into the town. There is a necessity for the cooperation at least in the way of artillery, by the troops on our right and left. Of the extent of this you will necessarily be the judge. I think our chances of success, in a plan of this kind, are more than even. . . . I propose to put in each of the eight magazines from twelve hundred to fourteen hundred pounds of powder; the magazines to be connected by a trough of powder instead of a fuse. I would suggest that the powder train be parked in a woods near our ammunition train, about a mile in rear of this place. Lieutenant-Colonel Pierce, chief quartermaster, will furnish Captain Strang with a guide to the place. I beg also to request that General Benham be instructed to send us at once eight thousand sand-bags, to be used for tamping and other purposes."

With a view of making the attack, the division of colored troops, under General Edward Ferrero, had been drilling for several weeks, General Burnside thinking that they were in better condition to head a charge than either of the white divisions. They had not been in any very active service. On the other hand, the white divisions had performed very arduous duties since the beginning of the campaign,* and before Petersburg had been in

colonel led the brigade, and there was no other field-officer present, the last major having been killed in the charge of June 17th; only two of the twelve captains remained. Other regiments of the division were correspondingly weak.—EDITOR.



* The Fourteenth New York Heavy Artillery (serving as infantry) which led the assault had little over three hundred duty men present. It had entered the campaign at the Wilderness 1800 strong. It was divided into three battalions led by five field-officers and twelve captains. The morning of the explosion its

such proximity to the enemy that no man could raise his head above the parapets without being fired at. They had been in the habit of using every possible means of covering themselves from the enemy's fire.

General Meade objected to the use of the colored troops, on the ground, as he stated, that they were a new division, and had never

while there the message was received from General Meade that General Grant disapproved of that plan, and that General Burnside must detail one of his white divisions to take the place of the colored division. This was the first break in the original plan. There was then scarcely twelve hours, and half of that at night, in which to make this change—and no possible time in which the white



RESERVOIR HILL, WHERE KAUTZ'S ADVANCE WAS STOPPED, JUNE 10TH. (SEE PAGE 760, AND MAP, PAGE 765.)

The spires of Petersburg are seen to the left of the reservoir. In front of the reservoir is the ravine of Lieutenant's Creek that encircles the eastern outskirts of the city and afforded the Confederates a concealed and convenient way by which either wing

of their lines could be reinforced by troops from the other. Mahone's troops followed it when they were called in haste from the lines on the Confederate right to assist in repelling the Union assault at the crater.—EDITOR.

been under fire, while this was an operation requiring the very best troops. General Burnside, however, insisted upon his programme, and the question was referred to General Grant, who confirmed General Meade's views, although he subsequently said in his evidence before the Committee on the Conduct of the War:

"General Burnside wanted to put his colored division in front, and I believe if he had done so it would have been a success. Still I agreed with General Meade as to his objections to that plan. General Meade said that if we put the colored troops in front (we had only one division) and it should prove a failure, it would then be said, and very properly, that we were shoving these people ahead to get killed because we did not care anything about them. But that could not be said if we put white troops in front."

The mine was charged with only 8000 pounds of powder, instead of 14,000 as asked for, the amount having been reduced by order of General Meade; and while awaiting the decision of General Grant on the question of the colored troops, precise orders for making and supporting the attack were issued by General Meade.

In the afternoon of the 29th of July, Generals Potter and Willcox met together at General Burnside's headquarters, to talk over the plans of the attack, based upon the idea that the colored troops would lead the charge, and

troops could be familiarized with the duties expected of them.

General Burnside was greatly disappointed by this change; but he immediately sent for General Ledlie, who had been in command of the First Division only about six weeks, and upon his arrival each of the three commanders of the white divisions presented reasons why his division should *not* lead the assault. General Burnside determined that they should "pull straws," and Ledlie was the (to him) unlucky victim. He, however, took it good-naturedly, and, after receiving special instructions from General Burnside, proceeded with his brigade commanders to ascertain the way to the point of attack. This was not accomplished until after dark on the evening before the mine was to be exploded.

The order of attack, as proposed by General Burnside, was also changed by direction of General Meade, with the approval of General Grant. Instead of moving down to the right and left of the crater of the mine, for the purpose of driving the enemy from their intrenchments, and removing to that extent the danger of flank attacks, General Meade directed that the troops should push at once for the crest of Cemetery Hill.

The approaches to the Union line of intrenchments at this particular point were so



FAC-SIMILE ENLARGEMENT OF A PART OF THE OFFICIAL MAP OF THE PETERSBURG CAMPAIGN.

Union works are indicated by the letter U, and by Roman numerals, VIII, IX, etc.; Confederate works by the letter C, and the redoubts of the first Confederate line by Arabic numerals, 5, 6, etc.



PROFILE OF THE GROUND BETWEEN THE CRATER AND THE MOUTH OF THE MINE.—I. (FROM A RECENT SKETCH.)

well covered by the fire of the enemy that they were cut up into a network of covered ways almost as puzzling to the uninitiated as the catacombs of Rome.*

Upon General Ledlie's return from the front orders were issued, and the division was formed at midnight. Shortly afterwards it advanced through the covered ways, and was in position sometime before daybreak, behind the Union breastworks, and immediately in front of the enemy's fort, which was to be blown up. The orders were that Ledlie's division should advance first, pass over the enemy's works, and charge to Cemetery Hill, four hundred yards to the right, and approached by a slope comparatively free from obstacles; the next division (Willcox's), as soon as the First Division should leave the works, was to advance to the left of Cemetery Hill, so as to protect the left flank of the First Division; and the next division (Potter's) was to move in the same way to the right of Cemetery Hill. The Ninth Corps being out of the way, it was intended that the Fifth and the Eighteenth corps should pass through and follow up the movement.

At 3:30 A. M. Ledlie's division was in position, the Second Brigade, Colonel E. G. Marshall in front, and that of General W. F.

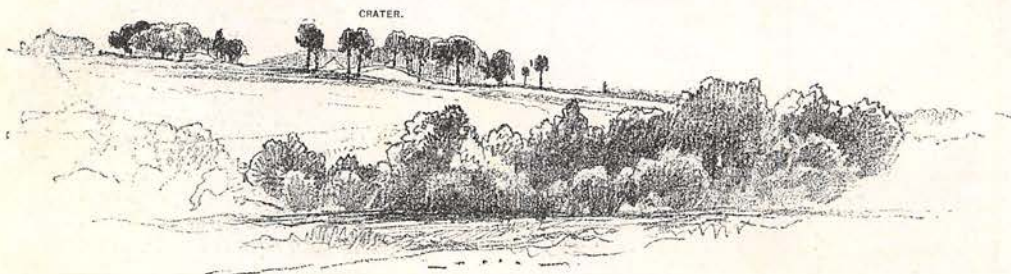
* The writer of this article was serving as Judge-Advocate of Ledlie's division, and also performed the duties of aide-de-camp to General Ledlie at the time of the explosion. When the orders were published for the movement, he and Lieutenant George M. Randall, also of the regular army and aide-de-camp to General Ledlie, were informed that they must accompany the advance troops in the attack, but that the volunteer

Bartlett behind it, the men and officers in a feverish state of expectancy, the majority of them having been awake all night. Daylight slowly came, and still they stood with every nerve strained prepared to move forward the instant an order should be given. Four o'clock arrived, officers and men began to get nervous, having been on their feet four hours; still the mine had not been exploded. It was at this time that General Ledlie directed me to go to General Burnside and report to him that the command had been in readiness to move since 3:30 A. M., and to inquire the cause of the delay of the explosion. I found General Burnside in rear of the Fourteen-gun battery, delivered my message, and received in reply from the general that there was some trouble with the fuse dying out, but that an officer had gone into the gallery to ignite it again, and the explosion would soon take place.†

I returned immediately, and just as I arrived in rear of the First Division the mine was sprung. It was a magnificent spectacle, and as the mass of earth went up into the air, carrying with it men, guns, carriages, and timbers, and spread out like an immense cloud as it reached its altitude, so close were the Union

staff would remain with General Ledlie, all of whom did so, during the entire engagement, in or near a bomb-proof within the Union lines.—W. H. P.

† Sergeant Henry Rees entered the mine and found that the fuse had died out at the first splicing. He cut the fuse above the charred portion; on his way out for materials he met Lieutenant Jacob Douty, who assisted in making a fresh splice, which was a success.—EDITOR.



PROFILE OF THE APPROACH TO THE CRATER, AS SEEN FROM A POINT SOUTH-EAST OF THE MOUTH OF THE MINE. (FROM A RECENT SKETCH.)

UNION BREASTWORKS.



MOUTH OF THE MINE.

PROFILE OF THE GROUND BETWEEN THE CRATER AND THE MOUTH OF THE MINE.—II.

lines that the mass appeared as if it would descend immediately upon the troops waiting to make the charge. This caused them to break and scatter to the rear, and about ten minutes were consumed in re-forming for the attack.* Not much was lost by this delay, however, as it took nearly that time for the cloud of dust to pass off. The order was then given for the advance. As no part of the Union line of breastworks had been removed (which would have been an arduous as well as hazardous undertaking), the troops clambered over them as best they could. This in itself broke the ranks, and they did not stop to re-form, but pushed ahead towards the crater, about one hundred and thirty yards distant, the débris from the explosion having covered up the abatis and *chevaux-de-frise* in front of the enemy's works.

Little did those men anticipate what they would see upon arriving there: an enormous hole in the ground about 30 feet deep, 60 feet wide, and 170 feet long, filled with dust, great blocks of clay, guns, broken carriages, projecting timbers, and men buried in various ways—some up to their necks, others to their waists, and some with only their feet and legs protruding from the earth. One of these near me was pulled out, and he proved to be a second lieutenant of the battery which had been blown up. The fresh air revived him, and he was soon able to walk and talk. He was very grateful and said that he was asleep when the explosion took place, and only awoke to find himself wriggling up in the air; then a few seconds afterwards he felt himself descending, and soon lost consciousness.

The whole scene of the explosion struck every one dumb with astonishment as we arrived at the crest of the débris. It was impossible for the troops of the Second Brigade to move forward in line, as they had advanced;

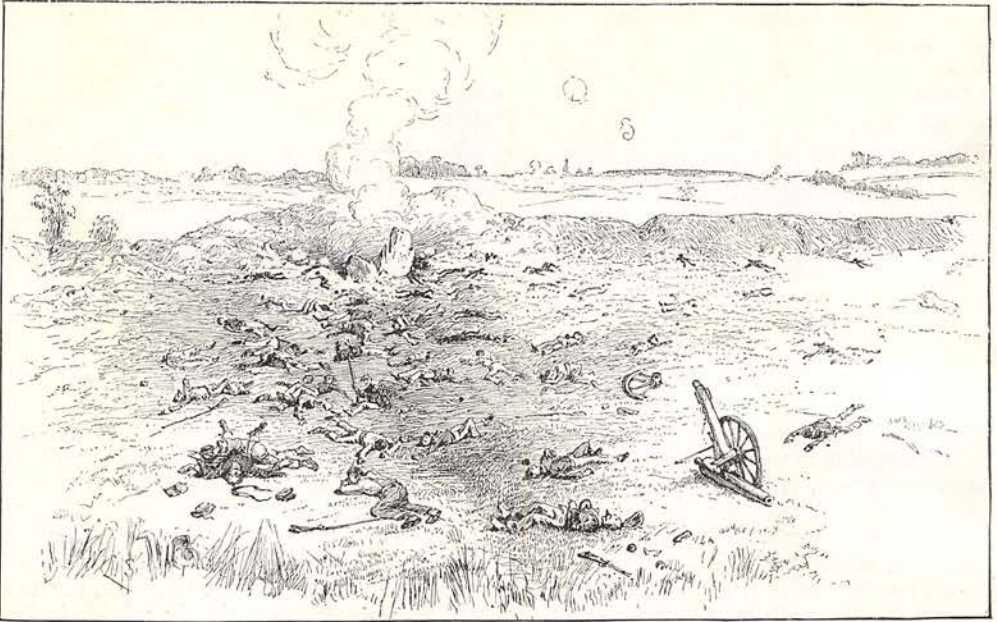
* Immediately following the explosion the heavy guns all along the line opened a severe artillery fire.

and, owing to the broken state they were in, every man crowding up to look into the hole, and being pressed by the First Brigade, which was immediately in rear, it was equally impossible to move by the flank, by any command, around the crater. Before the brigade commanders could realize the situation, the two brigades became inextricably mixed, in the desire to look into the hole.

However, Colonel Marshall yelled to the Second Brigade to move forward, and the men did so, jumping, sliding, and tumbling into the hole, over the débris of material, and dead and dying men, and huge blocks of solid clay. They were followed by General Bartlett's brigade. Up on the other side of the crater they climbed, and while a detachment stopped to place two of the dismounted guns of the battery in posi-



MAJOR-GENERAL ROBERT B. POTTER. (FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.)



THE CRATER, AS SEEN FROM THE CONFEDERATE SIDE. (FROM A SKETCH MADE BY A CONFEDERATE ARTILLERY OFFICER ON THE MORNING OF THE EXPLOSION, AND BEFORE THE CONFEDERATE COUNTER ASSAULT.)

tion on the enemy's side of the crest of the crater, a portion of the leading brigade passed over the crest and attempted to re-form. It was at this period that they found they were being killed by musket-shots from the rear, fired by the Confederates who were still occupying the traverses and intrenchments to the right and left of the crater. These men had been awakened by the noise and shock of the explosion, and during the interval before the attack had recovered their equanimity, and when the Union troops attempted to re-form on the enemy's side of the crater, they had faced about and delivered a fire into the backs of our men. This coming so unexpectedly caused the forming line to fall back into the crater.

Had General Burnside's original plan, providing that two regiments should sweep down inside the enemy's line to the right and left of the crater, been sanctioned, the brigades of Colonel Marshall and General Bartlett could and would have re-formed and moved on to Cemetery Hill before the enemy realized fully what was intended; but the occupation of the trenches to the right and left by the enemy prevented re-formation, and there being no division, corps, or army commander present to give orders to other troops to clear the trenches, a formation under fire from the rear was something no troops could accomplish.

After falling back into the crater a partial formation was made by General Bartlett and

Colonel Marshall with some of their troops, but owing to the precipitous walls the men could find no footing except by facing inwards, digging their heels into the earth, and throwing their backs against the side of the crater, or squatting in a half-sitting, half-standing posture, and some of the men were shot even there by the fire from the enemy in the traverses. It was at this juncture that Colonel



COLONEL HENRY PLEASANTS. (FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.)

Marshall requested me to go to General Ledlie and explain the condition of affairs, which he knew that I had seen and understood perfectly well. This I did immediately.

While the above was taking place the enemy had not been idle. He had brought a battery from his left to bear upon the position, and as I started on my errand, the crest of the crater was being swept with canister. Special

ing no person present with authority to change the programme to meet the circumstances. Had a prompt attack of the troops to the right and left of the crater been made as soon as the leading brigade had passed into the crater, or even fifteen minutes afterwards, clearing the trenches and diverting the fire of the enemy, a success was inevitable, and particularly would this have been the case on the left of the cra-

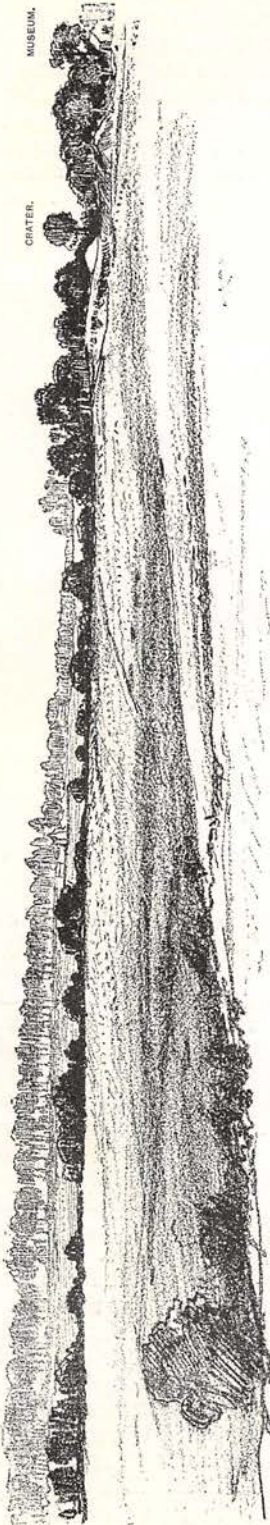


THE CONFEDERATE LINE AS RECONSTRUCTED AT THE CRATER. (FROM A DRAWING MADE BY LIEUTENANT HENDERSON AFTER THE BATTLE.)

attention was given to this battery by our artillery, but for some reason or other the enemy's guns could not be silenced. Passing to the Union lines under this storm of canister, I found General Ledlie and a part of his staff ensconced in a protected angle of the works. I gave him Colonel Marshall's message, explained to him the situation, and Colonel Marshall's reasons for not being able to move forward. General Ledlie then directed me to return at once, and say to Colonel Marshall and General Bartlett that it was General Burnside's order for them to move forward immediately. This message was delivered. But the firing on the crater now was incessant, and it was as heavy a fire of canister as was ever poured continuously upon a single objective point. It was as utterly impracticable to re-form a brigade in that crater as it would be to marshal bees into line after upsetting the hive; and equally as impracticable to re-form outside of the crater, under the severe fire in front and rear, as it would be to hold a dress parade in front of a charging enemy. Here, then, was the second point of advantage lost by there be-

ter, as the small fort immediately in front of the Fifth Corps, was almost, if not entirely, abandoned for a while after the explosion of the mine, the men running away from it as if they feared that it was to be blown up also.

Whether General Ledlie informed General Burnside of the condition of affairs as reported by me I do not know; but I think it likely, as it was not long after I had returned to the crater, that a brigade of the Second Division (Potter's) under the command of Brigadier-General S. G. Griffin advanced its skirmishers and followed them immediately, directing its course to the right of the crater. General Griffin's line, however, overlapped the crater on the left, where two or three of his regiments sought shelter in the crater. Those on the right passed over the trenches, but owing to the peculiar character of the enemy's works, which were not single, but complex and involuted and filled with pits, traverses, and bomb-proofs, forming a labyrinth as difficult of passage as the crater itself. This broke up the brigade, which, meeting the severe fire of canister, also fell back into the crater, which



VIEW OF THE GROUND ON THE CONFEDERATE SIDE OF THE CRATER. (FROM A RECENT SKETCH MADE FROM THE ROAD BACK OF THE CRATER, AND NEARLY HALF-WAY TO THE CEMETERY CREST.)

was then full to suffocation. Every organization melted away, as soon as it entered this hole in the ground, into a mass of human beings clinging by toes and heels to the almost perpendicular sides. If a man was shot on the crest he fell and rolled to the bottom of the pit.

From the actions of the enemy, even at this time, as could be seen by his moving columns in front, he was not exactly certain as to the intentions of the Union commander; he appeared to think that possibly the mine explosion was but a feint and that the main attack would come from some other quarter. He, however, massed some of his troops in a hollow in front of the crater, and held them in that position.

Meantime General Potter, who was in rear of the Union line of intrenchments, being convinced that something ought to be done to create a diversion and distract the enemy's attention from this point, ordered Colonel Zenas R. Bliss, commanding his First Brigade, to send two of his regiments to support General Griffin, and with the remainder to make an attack on the right. Subsequently it was arranged that the two regiments going to the support of General Griffin should pass into the crater, turn to the right and sweep down the enemy's lines. Colonel Bliss was partly successful, and obtained possession of some two or three hundred yards of the line, and one of the regiments advanced to within twenty or thirty yards of the battery whose fire was so severe on the troops; but it could make no further headway for lack of support — its progress being impeded by slashed timber, while an unceasing fire of canister was poured into the men. They therefore fell back to the enemy's traverses and intrenchments.

At the time of ordering forward Colonel Bliss's command General Potter wrote a dispatch to General Burnside, stating that it was his opinion, from what he had seen, and from the reports he had received from subordinate officers, that too many men were being forced in at this one point; that the troops there being in confusion, it was absolutely necessary that an attack should be made from some other point of the line, in order to divert the enemy's attention and give time to straighten out our line. To that dispatch he never received an answer. Orders were, however, being constantly sent to the three division commanders of the white troops to push the men forward as fast as could be done, and this was, in substance, about all the orders that were received by them during the day up to the time of the order for the withdrawal.

When General Willcox came with the Third Division to support the First, he found the latter and three regiments of his own, together with the regiments of Potter's Second Division which had gone in on the right, so completely filling up the crater that no more troops could be gotten in there, and he therefore ordered an attack with the remainder of his division on the works of the enemy to the left of the crater. This attack was successful, so far as to carry the intrenchments for about one hundred and fifty yards; but they held them only a short time.

Previous to this last movement I had again left the crater and gone to General Ledlie, and had urged him to try to have something done to the right and left of the crater — saying that every man who got into the trenches to the right or left of it used them as a means of escape to the crater, and the enemy was reoccupying them as fast as our men left. All the satisfaction I received was an order to go back and

tell the brigade commanders to get their men out and press forward to Cemetery Hill. This talk and these orders, coming from a commander sitting in a bomb-proof inside the Union lines, were disgusting. I returned again to the crater and delivered the orders, which I knew beforehand could not possibly be obeyed; and I told General Ledlie so before I left him. Upon my return to the crater, I devoted my attentions to the movements of the enemy, who was evidently making dispositions for an assault.

About two hours after the explosion of the mine (7 o'clock) and after I had returned to the crater for the third time, General Ferrero, commanding the colored division of the Ninth Corps, received an order to advance his division, pass the white troops which had halted, and move on to carry the crest of Cemetery Hill at all hazards. General Ferrero did not think it advisable to move his division in, as there were three divisions of white troops already huddled together, so he reported to Colonel Charles G. Loring, of General Burnside's staff, who requested Ferrero to wait until he could report to General Burnside. General Ferrero declined to wait, and then Colonel Loring gave him an order, in General Burnside's name, to halt without passing over the Union works, which order he obeyed. Colonel Loring went off to report to General Burnside, came back, and reported that the order was peremptory for the colored division to advance at all hazards.

The division then started in, moved by the left flank, under a most galling fire, passed around the crater on the crest of the débris, and all but one regiment passed beyond the crater. The fire upon them was incessant and severe, and many acts of personal heroism were done here by officers and men. Their drill for this object had been unquestionably of great benefit to them, and had they led the attack, fifteen or twenty minutes from the time the débris of the explosion had settled would have found them at Cemetery Hill, before the enemy could have brought a gun to bear on them.

But the leading brigade struck the enemy

which I had previously reported as massed in front of the crater, and in a sharp little action the colored troops captured some two hundred prisoners and a stand of colors and recaptured a stand of colors belonging to a white regiment of the Ninth Corps. In this almost hand-to-hand conflict, the colored troops became somewhat disorganized, and some twenty minutes were consumed in re-forming; then they made the attempt to move forward again. But, unsupported, subjected to a galling fire from batteries on the flanks and from infantry fire in front and partly on the flank, they broke up in disorder and fell back to the crater, the majority passing on to the Union line of defenses, carrying with them a number of the white troops who were in the crater and in the enemy's intrenchments.*

Had any one in authority been present when the colored troops made their charge, and had they been supported, even at that late hour in the day there would have been a possibility of success; but when they fell back and broke up in disorder, it was the closing scene of the tragedy. The rout of the colored troops was followed up by a feeble attack from the enemy, more in the way of a reconnaissance than a charge; but the attack was repulsed by the troops in the crater and the intrenchments connected therewith, and the Confederates retired.

It was now evident that the enemy did not fear a demonstration from any other quarter, as they began to collect their troops for a decisive assault. On observing this, I left the crater and reported to General Ledlie, whom I found seated in a bomb-proof with General Ferrero, that some means ought to be devised for withdrawing the mass of men from the crater without exposing them to the terrific fire which was kept up by the enemy; that if some shovels and picks could be found, the men in an hour could open a covered way by which they could be withdrawn; that the enemy was making every preparation for a determined assault on the crater, and, disorganized as the troops were, they could make no permanent resistance. Not an implement of any kind could be found, indeed the prop-

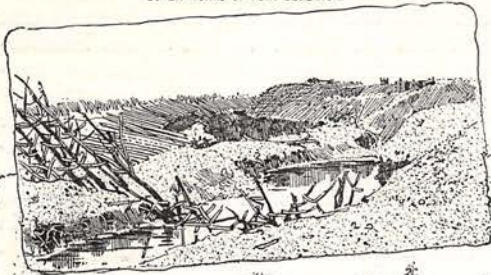
* A field-officer of one of the colored regiments [Lieutenant-Colonel John A. Bross] seized a stand of United States colors as he saw his men faltering when they first met the withering fire of the enemy, and mounting the very highest portion of the crest of the crater, waved the colors zealously amid the storm of shot and canister. The gallant fellow was soon struck to the earth.

While this was taking place, an amusing occurrence happened in the crater. As the colored column was moving by the left flank around the edge of the crater to the right, the file-closers, on account of the narrowness of the way, were compelled to pass through the mass of white men inside the crater. One of these file-

closers was a massively built, powerful, and well-formed sergeant, stripped to the waist—his coal-black skin shining like polished ebony in the strong sunlight. As he was passing up the slope to emerge on the enemy's side of the crest, he came across one of his own black fellows who was lagging behind his company, evidently with the intention of remaining inside the crater, out of the way of the bullets. He was accosted by the sergeant with "None ob yo' d—n skulkin,' now," with which remark he seized the culprit with one hand, and, lifting him up in his powerful grasp by the waistband of his trousers, carried him to the crest of the crater, threw him over on the enemy's side, and quickly followed.—W. H. P.

osition was received with disfavor. Matters remained *in statu quo* until about 2 P. M., when the enemy's anticipated assault was made.

OUTER WORKS OF FORT SEDGWICK.

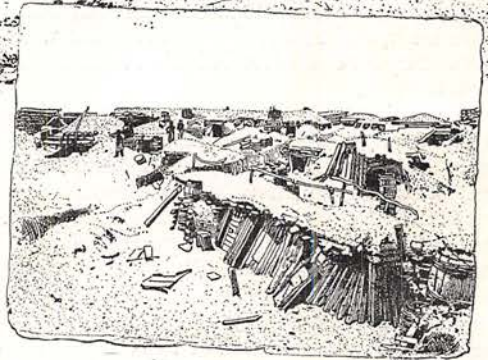


FORT SEDGWICK, KNOWN AS "FORT HELL," OPPOSITE THE CONFEDERATE FORT MAHONE, KNOWN AS "FORT DAMNATION." (FROM PHOTOGRAPHS.)

About 9:30 A. M. General Meade had given positive orders to have the troops withdrawn from the crater. To have done so, under the severe fire of the enemy, would have produced a stampede, which would have endangered the Union lines, and might possibly have communicated itself to the troops that were massed in rear of the Ninth Corps. General Burnside thought, for these and other reasons, that it was possible to leave his command there until nightfall, and then withdraw it. There was no means of getting food or water to them, for which they were suffering. The midsummer sun shone upon their heads until waves of moisture produced by the exhalation from this mass slowly arose in perceptible horizontal layers; wounded men died there begging piteously for a drink of water—a drop of which was not to be had, for the men had long since drained their canteens. Soldiers extended their tongues to dampen their parched lips until they seemed to hang from their mouths like those of thirsty dogs, and yet they were kept waiting in this almost boiling cauldron, suffering with thirst and worn out with their all-

night preparations and their fearful morning's work.

While the hours were thus wasted in the time and means necessary to extricate the human mass from its now perilous position, the enemy, having taken advantage of our inactivity to mass his troops, was seen to emerge from the bushes which grew in the swale between the hill on which the crater was situ-



BOMB-PROOFS INSIDE FORT SEDGWICK.

ated and that of the cemetery. On account of this depression they could not be seen by our artillery, and hence no guns were brought to bear upon them. The only place where they could be observed was from the crater. But there was no serviceable artillery there, and no sufficiently organized infantry force to offer resistance when the enemy's column pressed forward. All in the crater who could possibly hang on by their elbows and toes lay flat against its conical wall and delivered their fire; but not more than a hundred men at a time could get into position, and these were only armed with muzzle-loading guns, and in order to re-load, they were compelled to face about and place their backs against the wall.

The enemy's guns suddenly ceased their long-continued and uninterrupted fire on the crater, and the advancing column charged in the face of feeble resistance offered by the Union troops. At this stage they were perceived by our artillery, which opened a murderous fire, but too late. Over the crest and into the crater they poured, and a hand-to-hand conflict ensued. It was of short duration, however; crowded as our troops were, and without organization, resistance was vain. Many men were bayoneted at that time—some probably that would not have been, except amid the heat and excitement of battle. About 87 officers* and 1652 men of the Ninth Corps were captured, the remainder retiring to our own lines, to which the enemy did not attempt to advance.

In the engagements of the 17th and 18th of June, in order to obtain the position held by the Ninth Corps at the time of the explosion, the three white divisions had 29 officers and 348 men killed; 106 officers and 1851 men wounded; and 15 officers and 554 men missing—total, 2903. From the 20th of June to the day before the crater fight of July 30th these same divisions lost in the trenches 12 officers and 231 men killed; 44 officers and 851 men wounded; and 12 men missing—total, 1150. These casualties were caused by picket and shell firing, and extended pretty evenly over the three divisions. The whole of General Willcox's division was on the line for thirty days or more without relief. General Potter's and General Ledlie's divisions had slight reliefs, enabling those officers to draw some of their men off at intervals for two or three days at a time.

In the engagement of July 30th, the four divisions of the Ninth Corps had 52 officers and 376 men killed; 105 officers and 1556 men wounded; and 87 officers and 1652 men missing (captured)—total, 3828.†

It was provided in General Meade's order for the movement that the cavalry corps should make an assault on the left. Two divisions of the cavalry were over at Deep Bottom. They could not cross the river until after the

Second Corps had crossed, so that it was late in the day before they came up. Indeed, the head of the column did not appear before the offensive operations were suspended. As General James H. Wilson had been ordered to be in readiness, and in view of the unavoidable delay of General Sheridan, orders were sent to Wilson not to wait for General Sheridan, but to push on himself to the Weldon railroad. But the length of the march prevented success; so no attack was made by the cavalry, except at Lee's Mills, where General Gregg, encountering cavalry, drove them away in order to water his horses.

The Fifth Corps and the Eighteenth Corps remained inert during the day, excepting Tur-



SIDES AND EDGE OF TWO BULLETS THAT MET POINT TO POINT AT THE CRATER—THE SIDES FROM PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE ORIGINAL IN MAJOR GRIFFITH'S MUSEUM AT THE CRATER.

ner's division of the Eighteenth, which made an attempt on the right of the crater, but it happened to be just at the time that the colored troops broke up; so his command was thrown into confusion, and fell back to the trenches.

In this affair the several efforts made to push troops forward to Cemetery Hill were as futile in their results as the dropping of handfuls of sand into a running stream to make a dam. With the notable exception of General Robert B. Potter, not a division commander was in the crater or connecting lines, nor was there a corps commander on the immediate scene of action; the result being that the subordinate commanders attempted to carry out the orders issued prior to the commencement of the action, when the very first attack developed the fact that a change of those plans was absolutely necessary.

William H. Powell.

"Then you can't sit up," they urged, "you'll have to lie down."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed the general, "*it's only my cork leg that's shattered!*"—W. H. P.

† General Meade reported the losses of his army in the assault on the crater at 4400 killed, wounded, and missing, all except about 100 being in the Ninth Corps. General Mahone states that the number of prisoners taken was 1101. The loss in Lee's army is not fully reported. Elliott's brigade lost 677, and that was probably more than half of the casualties on the Confederate side.—EDITOR.

* General William F. Bartlett was among the captured. Earlier in the war he had lost a leg, which he replaced with a patent cork leg. While he was standing in the crater, a shot was heard to strike with the peculiar thud known to those who have been in action, and the general was seen to totter and fall. A number of officers and men immediately lifted him, when he cried out, "Put me any place where I can sit down."

"But you are wounded, General, aren't you?" was the inquiry.

"My leg is shattered all to pieces," said he.