

O.R.--SERIES I--VOLUME XLV/1 [S# 93]

NOVEMBER 14, 1864-JANUARY 23, 1865.--Campaign in North Alabama and Middle Tennessee.

No. 186.--Report of Col. Thomas J. Morgan, Fourteenth U. S. Colored Troops, commanding First Colored Brigade, of operations November 29, 1864-January 12, 1865

CHATTANOOGA, TENN., January 16, 1865.

MAJOR: I have the honor to submit the following report of the part taken by the forces under my command in the recent campaign:

On November 29, 1864, by order of Major-General Steedman I assumed command of the Fourteenth U.S. Colored Infantry, Lieutenant-Colonel Corbin, the Sixteenth U.S. Colored Infantry, Col. William B. Gaw, <ar93_535>and the Forty-fourth U.S. Colored Infantry, Col. L. Johnson, at Chattanooga, Tenn., and proceeded by railroad to Cowan, Tenn., and thence by railroad to Nashville, Tenn., reaching there with the Sixteenth and the main portion of the Fourteenth Regiments U.S. Colored Infantry on the 1st day of December, 1864. Col. L. Johnson, with the Forty-fourth U.S. Colored Infantry, and Capt. C. W. Baker, with Companies A and D of the Fourteenth U.S. Colored Infantry, occupied the rear section of the train which was transporting General Steedman's command to Nashville, Tenn. Seven miles north of Murfreesborough a train containing artillery and horses ran off the track and stopped the progress of the rear train, which, for some reason unexplained, was taken back to Murfreesborough with troops on board, a guard being left with the wrecked cars. During the night a construction train from Nashville removed the wreck and brought the remaining cars, horses, artillery, and guard, at an early hour on the 2d ultimo, to Nashville. At 8 a.m. 2d ultimo Colonel Johnson again started for Nashville, but when near Mill Creek he was attacked by a rebel cavalry command under General Forrest. The fight that ensued was quite creditable to the forces under Colonel Johnson. Colonel Johnson and Captain Baker are entitled to credit for the skill with which they fought and baffled the enemy and brought out their commands. I append the reports of those officers concerning this affair, marked A, B.(*) During the 2d ultimo the portion of the brigade with me, conforming to the movements of General Cruft, occupied the extreme left of the first line of battle, formed near house of Robert Rains, and constructed in its front, hastily, a line of defense, a breast-work of rails and earth with a light palisade in front. On the 3d this line was abandoned and a new line established nearer the city, where the brigade, increased by the return of Colonel Johnson and Captain Baker and the addition of a battalion of the Eighteenth U.S. Colored Infantry, under Major L. D. Joy, took position near the residence of Maj. William B. Lewis. On December 5 and 7 reconnaissances were made by the brigade, in conjunction with other troops, and the enemy were found to occupy the first line of works built by General Steedman near Rains' house; each day the enemy was driven from the left of their works, with slight loss to us. On the 5th one lieutenant and seven enlisted men of the enemy were captured by this brigade. A citizen living near the Murfreesborough pike was killed by a member of Company B, Sixteenth U.S. Colored Infantry. The report of Colonel Gaw concerning this is inclosed, marked C.(+) The conduct of officers and men on those occasions, save the misconduct of Colonel Gaw, which was reported at the time, was, so far as came under my observation, good. The coolness of the enlisted men under fire was especially gratifying to me.

On the night of the 14th of December orders were received to move at daybreak to make a demonstration upon the left, to occupy our first line of works, near Rains' house, if practicable, and to strongly menace the enemy's right to prevent the moving of his troops to resist the advance of the right of [the] Federal army when the main attack was to be made. On the evening of the 14th Colonel Gaw, by an soldierly process, succeeded in getting his regiment taken from the First Brigade and ordered to a safer place in the rear. An excellent regiment, the Seventeenth U.S. Colored Infantry, under a brave and gallant officer, Colonel Shafter, reported to me instead of the Sixteenth. Lieutenant-Colonel Grosvenor, commanding brigade of white troops, reported to me, and remained with me during the two days' battle. I inclose Colonel <ar93_536>Grosvenor's

report of the part taken by his command. (*) A section of artillery from Captain Osborne's (Twentieth Indiana) battery likewise was put under my charge. In company with my adjutant-general, during the night of the 14th ultimo, I visited the picket-line near the enemy's work, which it was designed to attack on morning of the 15th. The Murfreesborough pike at this point runs a little east of south, nearly parallel with Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad. The line of works was built almost at right angles with these roads. We ascertained from the pickets that the rebels had been at work actively during the afternoon with the spade, and their line of fires extended well toward the south. I concluded that a curtain had been built to protect the flank of the work, and that a line of rifle-pits had been made on the ground marked by the fires, and that if these rifle-pits could be carried and a column pushed well to the rear, the works near Rains' house would become untenable and the ground east of Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad be given up to us with little loss. Accordingly, on the morning of the 15th, when the fog, which lay like a winding sheet over the two armies, began to disappear, I moved my command out upon the Murfreesborough pike and disposed it as follows: The Fourteenth Colored Infantry was deployed in front as skirmishers; the Seventeenth and Forty-fourth Colored Infantry were formed in line of battle in rear of Fourteenth, and given in charge of Colonel Shafter, of the Seventeenth; the section of Captain Osborne's (Twentieth Indiana) battery was supported by the battalion Eighteenth U.S. Colored Infantry, Maj. L. D. Joy; Colonel Grosvenor was directed to send one battalion of his command to guard the left flank and to hold the remainder of his command in rear of Colonel Shafter. The artillery then opened upon the enemy, and the lines moved forward. The Fourteenth advanced until they drew a severe fire, when Colonel Shafter was ordered to carry the rifle-pits, which he did handsomely, killing, wounding, capturing, or driving away the enemy from his front. He pushed forward until he reached the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad, when he was met by a destructive fire at short range from a battery planted on the opposite side of a deep cut made by railroad. Seeing that Colonel Shafter had carried the line in his front, and that the enemy still held their position on his right, I ordered up to his support the reserve of Colonel Grosvenor. This command carried a portion of the line, but was quickly compelled to return, with severe loss, by reason of musketry fire on its right flank. What I had thought to be a mere curtain, proved to be a rude but strong lunette, with ditch in front and heavy head-logs on top of parapet, forming a very safe cover for Granbury's brigade, which occupied it. About the time of the repulse of Colonel Grosvenor Colonel Shafter was compelled to withdraw his line from the range of the artillery. The entire command was then withdrawn, by order of General Steedman, and moved to the north of Rains' house. A strong skirmish line, connecting on the right, at the railroad, with Colonel Thompson's command, advanced very close to the enemy's line. Sharpshooters loop-holed a dwelling-house and outbuildings and silenced the enemy. Thus the day wore away; the general's purpose, as communicated to me the night previous, had been accomplished; the enemy had been deceived, and, in expectation of a real advance upon his right, had detained his troops there, while his left was being disastrously driven back. The troops under my command have, as a whole, behaved well, and if they failed to accomplish all I expected it was my fault, not theirs; I was deceived as to the character of the work built by the enemy on the 14th. Could I have known the exact nature of the work, the troops would have carried it by a direct assault from the north side, with perhaps less loss than was sustained. During the night of the 15th the enemy retired from our front.

On the 16th my command, by order of General Steedman, crossed the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad, the Nolensville pike, and the Tennessee and Alabama Railroad, skirmishing with and driving the enemy. At an early hour in the afternoon the command joined the left of Colonel Thompson and confronted Overton Hill. Colonel Grosvenor was ordered to join the left of Second Colored Brigade and conform to its movements. He thus took part in the first assault upon Overton Hill. Colonel Shafter, with Seventeenth, was in echelon to rear of Grosvenor; Lieutenant-Colonel Corbin, with Fourteenth, was directed to support and protect the artillery; Colonel Johnson, Forty-fourth, was directed to guard the left. Captain Osborne's (Twentieth Indiana) battery and Captain Aleshire's (Eighteenth Ohio) battery kept up an incessant fire upon the enemy, and did excellent work. Subsequently the Fourteenth U.S. Colored Infantry was deployed as skirmishers in front of the artillery and directly facing the enemy's works, where

they kept and received a brisk fire. When the first assault upon the hill failed the assaulting column retired in disorder, passing through my skirmish line without shaking it. At one time I thought and so reported that the line was being forced back, but it was not true. The line remained; did its work amid the confusion that followed the repulse. When the Sixty-eighth Indiana struck this line they asked what regiment. Being answered, Fourteenth, they cried, "Bully for you; we'll stay with you," and they did. I assisted Colonel Thompson in reforming his broken lines. When the final assault was being made upon Overton Hill the forces under me moved forward and joined in the pursuit of the enemy, which followed as far as Franklin, Tenn. Subsequently the First Colored Brigade, as part of Second Provisional Division, accompanied the expedition toward Tuscumbia, Ala., going as far as Leighton, Ala. On its return it joined General Cruft's forces in the fruitless chase after General Lyon's rebel cavalry. The brigade was disbanded January 12, 1865.

Colonel Shafter, Seventeenth, acquitted himself well, is cool and brave, and a good disciplinarian. Lieutenant-Colonel Corbin, Fourteenth U.S. Colored Infantry, does not possess sufficient courage to command brave men. (*) Captain Baker in reality commanded the Fourteenth U.S. Colored Infantry in the battle of the 15th and 16th, and acquitted himself with great credit. He is brave, cool, untiring, and deserves promotion. Lieutenant-Colonel Grosvenor obeyed every order with promptness, and is a good soldier. To each member of my staff, Lieutenants Cleland and Hall, Forty-fourth U.S. Colored Infantry, Wadsworth and Dickinson, Sixteenth U.S. Colored infantry, and Wyrill, Fourteenth U.S. Colored Infantry, I am indebted for the promptness with which they carried out my desires, exposing themselves cheerfully to necessary danger. The wounded of the First Colored Brigade were faithfully cared for by Surgeon Clemons, Seventeenth U.S. Colored Infantry, Surgeon Strong, Forty-fourth U.S. Colored Infantry, and Assistant Surgeon Oleson, Fourteenth U.S. Colored Infantry. <ar93_538>

I have as yet received no reports from battalion commanders and no lists of casualties; these will be forwarded as soon as received.

I am, major, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

THOS. J. MORGAN,

Colonel Fourteenth U. S. Colored Infantry.

Maj. S. B. MOE,

Asst. Adjt. Gen., District of the Etowah.

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No. 188.--Report of Col. William R. Shafter, Seventeenth U. S. Colored Troops, of operations December 15-16, 1864.

HDQRS. SEVENTEENTH REGT. U.S. COLORED INFANTRY,
Nashville, Tenn., January 30, 1865.

COLONEL: In obedience to your instructions, I have the honor to report the part taken by the Seventeenth U.S. Colored Infantry in the battle of Nashville, December 15, 1864, as follows:

On the morning of December 15 I reported to you for duty with my regiment, in pursuance of orders from Brigadier-General Miller, commanding <ar93_539>post of Nashville, and was by you assigned to the First Provisional Brigade. At about 7 a.m. I marched out on the Murfreesborough pike about one mile from the city, and formed line of battle to the right of and parallel with the pike, the Forty-fourth U.S. Colored Infantry forming on my left, that regiment being our extreme left. Skirmishers from the Fourteenth U.S. Colored Infantry reporting the enemy as too strong for them, my regiment, with the Forty-fourth U.S. Colored Infantry, was ordered to advance and drive the enemy from his rifle-pits, which was at once done, the two regiments charging to the railroad, but were prevented from going farther by a deep cut, known as Rains' Cut. At that time we were at least 100 yards beyond and to the rear of the enemy's earth-works near Rains' house, and had we been well supported on our right I think the work could have been taken. As it was, we were soon obliged to fall back, which was done in rather a disorderly manner. As soon, however, as we were out of range of the enemy's canister we reformed and were soon afterward moved around to the right of the enemy's earth-work and took a second position near Rains' house, where we kept up a sharp skirmish with the enemy till night, when he withdrew from our immediate front.

The conduct of all my officers was all that I desire, and from the fact that it was the first time the men had ever been under fire I think they, too, did well I am satisfied that with practice they would make good fighters.

My loss was: Commissioned officers, killed, 2; mortally wounded, 1; badly wounded, 3. Enlisted men, killed, 14; wounded, 64; missing, none; many of the wounded have since died.

I inclose complete list of killed and wounded. (*)

I have the honor to be, colonel, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

W. R. SHAFTER,
Colonel Seventeenth U. S. Colored Infantry, Commanding.

Col. THOMAS J. MORGAN,
Fourteenth U. S. Colored Infantry.

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No. 189.--Report of Maj. Lewis D. Joy, Eighteenth U. S. Colored Troops, of operations December 15-16, 1864.

HEADQUARTERS EIGHTEENTH U. S. COLORED INFANTRY,
Bridgeport, Ala., January 17, 1865.

SIR: I hereby have the honor to make report of the part taken by the detachment of the Eighteenth U.S. Colored Infantry, under my command, at the battles before Nashville, December 15 and 16, 1864.

On the 15th we were ordered by Colonel Morgan, commanding colored brigade, to the support of a section of the Twentieth Indiana Battery, which position we occupied during the day, having one man wounded while changing position from the brick house on the extreme left of the line. That night 100 men, in charge of First Lieut. George J. Drew, Company B of our regiment, were engaged in throwing up earth-works at Camp Foster for the protection of the battery. On the morning of the 16th crossed to the west of the Nashville and Chattanooga <ar93_540>Railroad with the battery, and marched out on the pike west of that road until ordered to form connection with the Seventeenth U.S. Colored Infantry. Afterward reported to Colonel Shafter, Seventeenth U.S. Colored Infantry, and then to Lieutenant-Colonel Grosvenor, Eighteenth Ohio Veteran Volunteer Infantry, by order of Colonel Morgan. When the final charge was ordered on Overton Hill, at 4 p.m., we were ordered to take position on the left of Colonel Thompson's brigade in the first line, but having to pass through a thick mass of brush while the brigade was marching in open ground we failed to make the connection, and as the brigade continued obliquing to the left in our front, we did not regain our position during the charge. After the repulse of the first charge we reformed and took position on the right of the Seventeenth U.S. Colored Infantry, throwing up breast-works of rails for our protection, and there remained until the enemy were driven from the field.

I inclose list of killed, wounded, and missing during the two days' battle. (*)

Five men of my command who went through the fight in safety have since died from the effects of the severe exposure to which we were subjected, and two of my best officers were not expected to live, but I believe are now recovering.

Very respectfully, yours,

L. D. JOY,

Major Eighteenth U.S. Colored Infantry, Comdg. Detachment.

Lieut. J. E. CLELAND,

*Acting Assistant Adjutant-General, First Colored Brigade,
Major-general Steedman's Division, Army of the Cumberland.*