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THE DEFEAT AT VICKSBURG.

According to the most reliable reports which have gained publicity, it appears that General Sherman's attack on Vicksburg was unsuccessful, and that after gaining some advantages, which induced a belief that that stronghold of the enemy would unavoidably and speedily fall into the hands of the Federals, the grand army under the command of Gen. Sherman was ultimately defeated and driven back to the fleet, which had conveyed the troops down the Mississippi and up the Yazoo to a point ten miles from its mouth where the land forces were disembarked, and where, after having been repulsed with dreadful slaughter, they re-embarked and proceeded up the Mississippi towards Napoleon, Ark.

The reports concerning the unfortunate attack represent that on landing his forces Gen. Sherman advanced towards the town on Wednesday, the 24th of December, and encountered the enemy in force as soon as he was out of range of the gunboats, and a battle ensued which lasted five hours, resulting in the repulse of the Confederates, who fell back beyond the bayous in the rear of the city. The fight was continued during Thursday, Friday and Saturday, the Federals gaining ground slowly but steadily. On Saturday night the opposing armies slept on their arms, the bayous intervening between them, and the battle was renewed at daylight on the morning of Sunday, the 28th, Gen. Sherman advancing with his entire force which was engaged by sunrise. Some of the Confederate's works were carried in the course of the forenoon by storm, and all things seemed to indicate that Vicksburg would soon be occupied by the assailants.

On the morning of Monday, the 29th, three lines of the enemy's works had been carried and the fourth line had been assailed, with a fair prospect that it would soon have to yield to the force which was operating against it. That line was two miles in rear of the town, between which and the city there was but little obstruction.

On Sunday night, eight or ten thousand troops from Gen. Grant's command arrived, increasing Gen. Sherman's force to forty thousand men. The Confederate force had been, as stated, increased to sixty-five thousand, by reinforcements from Jackson, Grenada, and other points, with which overwhelming force the Confederates attacked Gen. Sherman on Sunday, and forced him to fall back to the outer line of entrenchments with great loss. The fighting on Sunday and Monday is represented to have been exceedingly fierce and bloody, and batteries and fortifications were taken and retaken, whole regiments and even brigades fighting hand to hand over their guns for the possession of the defences. The 4th Iowa is said to have lost six hundred men in the battle on Sunday, and the 13th Illinois and 8th Missouri suffered severely, as did also several other regiments, at least one-half of their number having been killed, wounded or captured.

On Tuesday, the 30th, the Confederates, according to their showing, advanced again upon the Federals, who had commenced throwing up works on the shores of the lake; drove them from all parts of the field back to their boats, on which they re-embarked in great haste. It is stated that the enemy were so close upon them that they came within range of the gunboats, which opened fire upon the advancing columns, and threw shot and shell among them in such profuse abundance that they had to retire beyond range with severe loss.

Gen. Sherman's repulse is said to have been complete, and his losses heavy, both in men and munitions of war, but no definite statement of the extent of the calamity has as yet been made public.

Communication between Cairo and Gen. Sherman's command had at latest dates been suspended by way of the river, as the Confederates had placed batteries on both sides of the Mississippi at Cypress Bend, rendering it unsafe for steamers to pass either up or down. It is stated, however, that when it shall become necessary, the gunboats can easily remove the obstructions.

The last heard from Gen. Banks' expedition it was moving up the river, but why it did not arrive in time to co-operate with Gen. Sherman, has not transpired.

That another attempt will be made to capture Vicksburg before long is more than probable. The Confederates evidently anticipate another attack, as they are making preparations to defend the city to the last extremity.

PROGRESS OF THE WAR EAST OF THE ALLEGHANIES.

Since the battle of Fredericksburg, and the retirement of the army of the Potomac to the north side of the Rappahannock, it has, so far as known, remained encamped at Falmouth, while the Confederate army, under Gen. Lee, has continued to occupy Fredericksburg, and other positions along the right bank of the Rappahannock, neither of them having done much towards bringing the war to a close by hostile demonstrations or strategy, further than to make each, respectively, a few raids, in which the Confederate cavalry, under Stuart, seem to have been more successful than have the detachments sent out on similar occasions by Gen. Burnside or any of his subordinates.

The most bold and daring exploits of the Confederates, reported of late, was an excursion made in the rear of the Federal army at Falmouth, about the 28th of December, during which, an attack was made on Dumfries and Occoquan, the results of which, according to most of the statements that have been published, were favorable to them. The official report represented that the attacking party was repulsed with loss, and that Stewart narrowly escaped capture in his hasty retreat by way of Bull Run. The reports are various in relation to the affair, which some of the Northern journals have considered a disgraceful occurrence, and one that would not have transpired if the officers commanding the various camps and posts along the Rappahannock had been vigilant in the discharge of their duties, but it has fully been made to appear that a raid was made by Stewart and that after accomplishing much, whether it was all that was intended or not, he effected his escape, without material loss.

What the next move of the army of the Potomac will be no one seems to know, and but very little has been said concerning its future operations. It may be put in motion again in the spring, with a view to the accomplishment of the original design of capturing Richmond, and it may be required to perform service in some other part of the country where it may do more towards putting down the rebellion than it has, thus far, in all its campaigns in Virginia and Maryland.

It is not probable that much more will be done toward prosecuting the war during the winter in the "Old Dominion," but from present appearances, there will be some fighting done in North Carolina before long. It is reported that Gen. Foster had, a short time since, an army of 50,000 men at Newbern, and that an advance on Goldsboro and other places in the occupancy of the enemy, would soon be made. Southern accounts state that the movements of the Yankees have been fully anticipated, and that there has been a sufficient force stationed at the points threatened, to repulse the "invaders" when they again resume aggressive warfare. News from that region is looked for with considerable interest, in consequence of the formidable preparations for war which have recently been made at Newbern and at other points on the Atlantic sea-board, from which great results are anticipated.

PROGRESS OF WINTER.—The new year was ushered in by a snow storm, since which the weather has been considerably stormy, but not very cold, snow and rain, alternating with rough winds occasionally and mud in profusion, when the thermometer has ranged long at a time above the freezing point. Vehicles constructed with runners have not been in demand thus far and from present appearances will not be this winter.

THE BATTLE OF MURFREESBORO OR STONE'S RIVER.

The reports which have come to hand in relation to the great battle near Murfreesboro, commenced on the thirtieth day of December eighteen sixty-two, and ended on the third day of January, eighteen sixty-three, represent that it was exceedingly fierce and sanguinary and unquestionably thus far the battle of the war, all the combatants having fought with a determination seldom witnessed in modern times.

Gen. Rosecrans, commanding the Federal army which had assembled at Nashville, numbering, as per statement, forty-five thousand men, deeming that it would be better to meet and fight the Confederates under Gen. Bragg who had advanced to and occupied Murfreesboro, at that place or in some open field, than to let him besiege Nashville, which was evidently the enemy's intention—put his entire force in motion on the morning of the 26th of December, for Murfreesboro by three several routes. It appears that neither of the three corps or grand divisions, under Generals Thomas, McCook and Crittenden respectively, had proceeded far before they encountered the enemy who were driven back at every point till dark, when Nolensville was occupied by the Federals.

On Saturday morning the 27th, McCook, who commanded the right wing, was ordered to move forward against two divisions of the enemy, under Hardee, stationed at Triune, which McCook successfully accomplished, as Hardee is said to have fallen back rapidly, as the Federal divisions composing McCook's corps advanced, not however without showing fight, and considerable skirmishing is reported to have taken place between the retiring columns of the enemy and Gen. McCook's advance. Crittenden's corps on the left also drove the enemy from one position after another during the day, and at night the Federal and Confederate armies encamped on Stuart's Creek; one occupying the right, the other the left bank of that stream in close proximity to each other, about twenty miles south of Nashville, and in that position they remained over Sunday the 28th, according to the statements which have been made. Gen. Rosecrans either from religious or other considerations considered it proper to let his army rest on that day.

The Federal army is reported to have been put in motion early on Monday morning the 29th—crossed the creek without much opposition from the enemy, who fell back to the east side of Stone's River, where a stand was made and the several divisions of the Confederate army were arranged for battle, indicating that they intended to fight before falling back any further.

As soon as Gen. Rosecrans was informed of the position of the enemy and the manifest intention of Gen. Bragg to give battle, which was late in the afternoon, he immediately ordered Generals Crittenden and McCook to place the several divisions of their respective corps in position for the approaching contest, which orders were immediately obeyed and every preparation was made which the circumstances and the nature of the position would admit of for the impending battle.

There was evidently considerable fighting done on Tuesday, December 30th, but at what hour the battle commenced, and what corps and divisions of the Federal army were engaged, has not, by the meagre reports of the movements of the respective armies on that day, which have come to hand, been made to appear. The results of the conflict during that day are reported to have been favorable to the Federal arms.

On the morning of December 31st, at daylight, the battle was renewed and raged with awful fury, according to both the Federal and Confederate reports, throughout the entire day. The right wing of the Federal army, commanded by McCook, was confronted by the Confederate legions under Gen. Hardee, which fought with such desperation that it was impossible for Gen. McCook's divisions to withstand the onslaught that was made upon them by the enemy, and they gave way and fell back in the wildest confusion some three or four miles. The slaughter is represented to have been awful, almost beyond description. Three Illinois regiments are reported to have lost two-thirds of their number.

The battle is also reported to have raged with great fury on the left, and early in the day the enemy had made so much impression

upon the columns composing that wing that it became necessary to make a change of the front. The battle soon became general along the whole line, the enemy making assault after assault, which caused the Federal columns at times to give way. Orders were given for the left wing to advance and charge upon the foe, but before they could be executed, another famous assault was made on the centre which caused it to break and fall back. At that critical moment Gen. Rosecrans' division was thrown into the breach and the enemy in turn were repulsed with great slaughter.

It is stated that early in the day the want of ammunition began to be seriously felt by the Federal army, as the Confederate cavalry under Gen. Wheeler had made a detour in the rear of the Federal army and destroyed several baggage and ammunition trains. According to the statement of the enemy, three hundred wagons containing property to the amount of two millions of dollars were captured and burned, and seven hundred prisoners taken by Gen. Wheeler during the day, and he succeeded afterwards in returning in safety to the Confederate lines, making a complete circuit around the Federal army. Ammunition became so scarce that not a single wagon load could be found, as alleged, and several batteries had not a single round left, and could take no part in the action.

In the afternoon at about two o'clock, the battle had changed from the right to the left wing, the enemy having moved his forces, crossed the river, moving under cover of a high bluff, made a desperate attack on the Federate columns occupying that part of the field, which for some time is said to have been favorable to Confederates. The slaughter was such as might be expected to result from a conflict in which the combatants on both sides were determined to conquer or die, as thousands of them died before the advance of the enemy was checked by the murderous fire of musket and artillery, which was poured upon them by those from the Federal lines. The scene is said to have been "magnificently grand," as the contending armies were hurling shot and shell and other iron and leaden missiles into each others ranks, mowing them down as said with "indescribable slaughter."

Late in the afternoon, the much exhausted enemy took up a position that could not be assailed without more artillery than Rosecrans had at command. At dark the conflict ceased, after having raged with unceasing fury eleven hours. It is admitted that the fighting on that day resulted favorably to the enemy.

The following account of the defeat and rout of the right wing of the Federal army, and of the subsequent repulse of the Confederate columns which, attacked the centre, has been given by a reporter who was an eyewitness of the horrid scenes which transpired on that part of the field during the first day's fight:

Gen. McCook's command, which was on the right, composed of Johnson's, Davis' and Sheridan's divisions, was posted from right to left in the order named. Early in the morning the enemy threw himself upon Sheridan with terrible energy and was thrice repulsed. The fourth time he advanced with a larger number and with greater desperation than before. Sheridan's men were compelled to give ground, but it was only for a moment. The gallant Gen. Sill, assisted by other daring officers, soon rallied the troops and the Stars and Strips once more advanced, and the rebels were driven from their quarter of the field. It was a few minutes after eight o'clock when this occurred, and but a short time elapsed before attention was directed to the right, where three divisions of the enemy under Hardee advanced in massive columns and charged impetuously on Johnson, Davis and a portion of Johnson's infantry. Johnson's division immediately broke, almost before they had time to take their arms from the stack. Edgerton's battery was taken before it fired three rounds. Simonson's battery fought well and brought off all but two guns. Goodspeed's battery fired several rounds and then lost four pieces. Gen. Kirk, commanding one of the brigades of this division, was severely wounded while endeavoring to rally his regiment.

The enemy by this time had succeeded in getting the right flank completely hemmed in. A large number of officers of every grade were shot down while standing at the muzzles of the rebel muskets. Brigades and regiments rushed upon one another in disgraceful disorder and the route of the division became irrevocable and total. No other conclusion can be arrived at but that the right were completely surprised, and that too under circumstances which should have rendered it particularly vigilant.

It was left to Sheridan to stay the further to successful onset of the foe and never did man about more faithfully than he to perform