



November 29, 1864 - January 12, 1865 - Operations of the Fourteenth, Sixteenth and Forty-fourth United States Colored Infantry

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.

MAJ.: 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 Maj.-Gen. Steedman I assumed command of the Fourteenth U. S. Colored Infantry, Lieut.-Col. Corbin, the Sixteenth U. S. Colored Infantry, Col. William B. Gaw, 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 Regt. 's 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 Gen. 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 cars, horses, artillery, and guard, at an early hour on the 2d ultimo, to Nashville. At 8 a. m. 2d ultimo Col. Johnson again started for Nashville, but when near Mill Creek he was attacked by a rebel cavalry command under Gen. Forrest. The fight that ensued was quite creditable to the forces under Col. Johnson. Col. Johnson and Capt. 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. ^{Note 1} During the 2d ultimo the portion of the brigade with me, conforming to the movements of Gen. 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 by the return of Col. Johnson and Capt. Baker and the addition of a battalion of the Eighteenth U. S. Colored Infantry, under Maj. 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 Gen. Steedman near Rains' house; each 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 Col. Gaw concerning this is inclosed, marked C. **Note 2** The conduct of officers and men on those occasions, save the misconduct of Col. 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 Col. Gaw, by unsoldierly 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, Col. Shafter, reported to me instead of the Sixteenth. Lieut.-Col. Grosvenor, commanding brigade of white troops, reported to me, and remained with me during the two days' battle. I inclose Col. Grosvenor's report **Note 3** of the part taken by his command. A section of artillery from Capt. 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 works 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 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 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 Col. Shafter, of the Seventeenth; the section of Capt. Osborne's (Twentieth Indiana) battery was supported by the battalion Eighteen U. S. Colored Infantry, Maj. L. D. Joy; Col. 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 Col. Shafter. The artillery then opened the enemy, and the lines moved forward. The Fourteenth advanced until they drew a severe fire, when Col. 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 battery





planted on the opposite side of a deep cut made by railroad. Seeing that Col. 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 Col. Grosvenor. This command carried a portion of the line, but was quickly completed 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 for Granbury's brigade, which occupied it. About the time of the repulse of Col. Grosvenor Col. Shafter was completed to withdraw his line from the range of the artillery. The entire command was then withdrawn, by order of Gen. Steedman, and moved to the north of Rains' house. A strong skirmish line, connecting on the right, at the railroad, with Col. 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 Gen. 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 in the afternoon the command joined the left of Col. Thompson and confronted Overton Hill. Col. 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. Col. Shafter, with Seventeen, was in echelon to rear of Grosvenor; Lieut.-Col. Corbin, with Fourteenth, was directed to support and protect the artillery; Col. Johnson, Forty-fourth, was directed to guard the left. Capt. Osborne's (Twentieth Indiana) battery and Capt. 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 Col. 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 Leigton, Ala. On its return it joined Gen. Cruft's forces in the fruitless chase after Gen. Lyon's rebel cavalry. The brigade was disbanded January 12, 1865.

Col. Shafter, Seventeenth, acquitted himself well, is cool and brave, and a good disciplinarian. Lieut.-Col. Corbin, Fourteenth U. S. Colored Infantry, does not possess sufficient courage to command brave men.^{Note 4} Capt. 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. Lieut.-Col. Grosvenor obeyed every order with promptness, and is a good soldier. To each member of my staff, Lieut.'s Cleland and Hall, Forty-fourth U. S. Colored Infantry, Wadsworth and Dickinson, Sixteenth U. S. Colored Infantry, and Wyrill, Fourteen the 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 for by Surgeon, Clemons, Seventeenth U. S. Colored Infantry, and Assistant Surgeon Oleson, Fourteenth U. S. Colored Infantry.

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

THOS. J. MORGAN, Col. Fourteen U. S. Colored Infantry.

Maj. S. B. MOE, Asst. Adj. Gen., District of the Etowah.

OR, Ser. I, Vol. 45, pt. I, pp. 534-537.^{Note 5}

Note 1: See below: December 2-5, 1864, "Operatins against stockades and block-houses held by U. S. C. T. on N&E Railroad," below.

Note 2: Not found.

Note 3: Not found.

Note 4: Col. Corbin was subsequently tried before a general court-martial on the charge of "cowardice" and "misbehavior before the enemy," &c.; was found not guilty, and "most honorably" acquitted. Vide General Orders, No. 6, headquarters First Separate Division, Army of the Cumberland, March 14, 1865.

Note 5: See also: *Rebellion Record*, Vol. 11, pp. 98-100.

