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Document: *Willcox's Antietam battle report, dated September 21, 1862*

Transcription:

Head Quarters 1st Division
9th Army Corps
Antietam Creek, Md. Sept. 21st 1862

Sir

I have the honor to submit my report for the 17th inst.

This division marched out of camp to the hills overlooking the Antietam near the stone bridge Sharpsburg road. My orders from Genl Burnside in person were to cross over after Sturgis should have earned the bridge & after Cox and Rodman's divisions should have crossed. My orders then were to take the right of the Corps in the attack on Sharpsburg.

After crossing the bridge the road turns sharp to the right runs up the stream about 200 yds then to the left along an open hollow, which winds along to the village, overlooked by heights to the right and left. Once on the heights the country is rolling and intersected with field fences many of which are stone. The enemy's sharpshooters were posted behind these fences as well as haystacks, which also, with orchards, and cornfields served to conceal their lines. A battery of field guns also commanded the road and hollow down to the river, and the whole plateau above was swept by cross fire of Artillery.

Christ's brigade was filed across the hollow and drawn (over)

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up along the crest on the right of the road his left resting near the road, the 79th N.Y. (Highlanders) Lt. Col. Morrison, deployed as skirmishers and the other three regiments of the brigade in line of battle. These regiments were 50th Pa, Major Overton, 28th Mass. Capt. Caraher and 17th Mich., Col. Withington.

The 2nd Brigade under Col. Welsh formed on the heights to the left of the road, deploying 100th Pa. Lieut. Col. Leckey, as skirmishers and forming his other 3 regiments in line of battle, viz. 45th Pa., Lieut. Col. Curtin, on the right, 46th N.Y. Lieut. Col. Gerhard, in the centre, 8th Mich., Capt. Ely, on the left.

I brought with the division Cook's battery 8th Mass. & left Benjamin's Battery 2nd U.S. Artillery doing good work in a commanding position across the river in our rear, against the enemy's guns on the plateau and heights in front of us.

My division now formed part of a line which Genls Burnside and Cox were commanding & all moved forward about [blank space] o'clock. We were under fire from the moment a man appeared at the crest of the plateau or crossed the hollow. Taking two pieces of Cook's battery under Lieut. Coffin, I moved up the road while the two brigades gallantly advanced over the plateau towards Sharpsburg. The rest of Cook's battery was posted on a hill near the bridge and Crook's brigade of Cox's division followed in support of my line.

Christ's brigade attacked a force of the enemy's infantry along his front and drove them steadily before him. In following them up,



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his brigade got in advance of the rest of the line, and his supports were not up. While halting the enemy turned their battery on him from their right (our left) and for a few moments his troops were exposed to the fire of this battery, fire of infantry from a cornfield in his front protected by a stone fence, and from a battery further up in front beyond the cornfield.

The left coming up soon attracted the attention of the flanking battery. Lt. Coffin directed his pieces on the battery beyond the cornfield, and at same time Christ threw forward 17th Mich with supports to charge the battery, seeing which the guns were withdrawn.

Meantime Welsh conducted his brigade against the enemy in his front and drove them before him with the same success, his right following the crest of the hollow gradually approaching Christ's left, so that by the time we entered Sharpsburg the quarter part of my division was on the right of the road and extended across the hollow of the side hill and on the plateau. On the side hill was an orchard in which a large force of the enemy was posted and firing heavily both at Welsh and Christ.

In finding a position for Coffin's two guns at the head of a lane which turned up at the first house we passed, I was now able both to see and assist my division at every part of the ground, and Coffin threw solid shot, shell and canister with great precision and effect into the enemy's ranks. The force in the orchard were dislodged and fled up the hillside followed by our fire of both infantry and artillery, and Welsh occupied the orchard.

Our musket ammunition was now exhausted, we had carried the heights of Sharpsburg and rested partly in the town and (over)

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partly on the hills. The enemy kept up a desultory fire along our line but at a respectful distance, so that when Sturgis on the extreme left became heavily pressed and I was ordered to withdraw to the place where my division formed near the river, every regiment marched back in perfect order.

To assist the struggling left I had already detached Coffin with his two guns. He moved across the field to the left and rear and opened upon the enemy within 300 yards. Here he remained doing signal execution until he also exhausted his ammunition and withdrew.

As Lieut. Benjamin was detached from the division I enclose a copy of his report separately [sic].

I have particularly to notice the good conduct of Cols. B.C. Christ and Tho^s Welsh, Comd'g Brigades, and all the officers and men under their respective commands. There is no officer or man among them who cannot feel proud of having been engaged in the battle of Sharpsburg and I recommend that all the regiments of my division be allowed to inscribe "Sharpsburg" on their Colors.

I would also commend the cool, skillful and gallant conduct of Lieut. Benjamin and his Officers and men and the efficiency of Lieut. John A. Coffin of Cook's battery who with his section acted under my own eyes, moving up in the most dashing manner into the village, and striking with his shot on every side. He mentions his two Chiefs, of pieces Serjts. W^m Davis and Newall B. Allen, and all his men. Of my personal Staff I have particularly to commend Capt. Robt. A. Hutchins A. A. Genl. and my aids Lieut. Brackett, 28th Mass. And Lieut. James W. Romeyn 4th Mich. for promptness and fearlessness in carrying orders, and Lieut. Dearborne A.D.C. also in charge of the ammunition



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train for following up the command with ammunition and delivering it to all the troops of the Corps at a critical time.

I append a list of casualties.

Respectfully
(signed) O.B. Willcox
Brig. Genl. Comd'g Division

[Exterior]

Report
Battle of Sharpsburgh
Septem. 17, 1862
1st Division,
9th Army Corps,
General Willcox

Analysis: Wiggin

Handwritten report most likely in a copyist's hand of General Orlando Willcox's Antietam Battle Report. Letterhead reads "Battle of Sharpsburgh, Antietam Creek, Maryland." Report details the activities of Willcox's 1st Division (includes Welsh's 2nd Brigade) during the battle of Antietam. Narrative includes recognition of Colonel Thomas Welsh for "good conduct."

Note: an addenda titled "Itinerary of the First Division, Ninth Army Corps, September 1-October 31, 1862" to this letter can be found at <https://civilwarhome.com/willcoxantietamor.html>.

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