

THE WAR OF THE REBELLION: A COMPILATION OF THE OFFICIAL RECORDS OF THE UNION AND CONFEDERATE ARMIES

Prepared, Under the Direction of the Secretary of War

By

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And

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Headquarters First Brigade, Grover's Division,
In camp on Bayou Boeuff, beyond
Washington, La., April 27, 1863.

Sir: In compliance with Special Orders, No. 100, I have the honor to submit the following report of the operations of this brigade from the time it left Baton Rouge until its arrival in Opelousas:

This brigade embarked on board the transport Saint Mary's Iberville, Morning Light, Empire Parish, and Saint Maurice on the afternoon of March 26, 1863. These transports sailed at 5 o'clock a.m., March 27, 1863, for Donaldsonville, where the troops were debarked. The disorders of this embarkation and passage have been fully reported to you. The offenders in the Sixth Regiment New York Volunteers have been punished, and I may be permitted here to state that the conduct of the regiment since it has been purged of its bad officers and soldiers has been such as to deserve great praise. The brigade remained in Donaldsonville until the morning of March 31, when it marched with the remainder of the division for Thibodeauxville. It marched through that place and encamped at Terre Bonne Railroad Station April 2, 1863. The next morning the brigade moved by railroad to Bayou Boeuff, where it encamped. The conduct of the brigade during this march was generally very good. No cases of marauding and pillage occurred, to my knowledge, such as have

since disgraced this army. But in these early days of the march it was evident that the severest measures would be needed to secure obedience and order. In an aggravated case of disobedience of orders on the part of a soldier, and of his having attempted the lives of two officers who gave the orders, I ordered the immediate execution of the soldier. It would have been well if the execution had taken place. It was a military necessity to the morale of the command.

This brigade marched from Bayou Boeuff on the 9th of April, 1863, to Brashear City, which place it reached the same day. On Saturday, April 11, it embarked on board the steamers Clifton, Estrella, Saint Mary's, and Calhoun for a landing on Grand Lake, in rear of Franklin, La. The transports and gunboats sailed on Sunday forenoon and reached Madam Porter's shell-road landing during that afternoon. A reconnaissance of this road, made under the direction of Lieutenant Colonel Fiske, of the First Louisiana, showed this road to be impracticable. The Clifton then moved to Madam Porter's plantation road landing. At about 1 o'clock on Monday morning, April 13, Capt. W. J. Denslow, of my staff, and Lieutenant Matthews, acting as an aide on my staff, with a few men from the Sixth Regiment New York Volunteers, made a reconnaissance of this road, leading from Grand Lake to Bayou Teche. It was found to be practicable for all arms, and at dawn of day the brigade commenced its debarkation. The First Regiment Louisiana Volunteers, under Colonel Holcomb, was the first regiment to land. As soon as it advanced from the beach over the open field toward the thick wood the enemy opened fire from a single piece of artillery, and immediately after their skirmishers opened with musketry. Lieutenant Colonel Fiske, commanding the advance of the First Regiment Louisiana Volunteers, advanced rapidly upon their position, Colonel Holcomb supporting him with the remainder of the regiment. They forced the wood, the enemy leaving in a very hasty manner. The First Regiment Louisiana Volunteers advanced about three-quarters of a mile to the outer skirt of the wood nearest the Teche. In this position I re-enforced him with all the troops that had landed, Colonel Birge, commanding the Third Brigade, furnishing me with two regiments for this purpose from his brigade, these regiments having landed from the transport Laurel Hill. It was now 9 o'clock a.m. At this time appeared to our front and right a force of the enemy, consisting of cavalry and four pieces of artillery. This force was increased by the appearance of some infantry, which appeared to be moving toward my right flank. At 10:30 a.m. a battery of artillery and some cavalry having reported to me, and the enemy having apparently withdrawn his force behind the sugar-house at McWilliams' plantation, I commenced advancing my skirmishers over the open field in my front, and I ordered the cavalry to go forward and seize the junction of the plantation road, over which I had advanced, with the road on the banks of the Teche. This movement caused the enemy to reappear with his cavalry and two pieces of his artillery and to open fire on our cavalry. I immediately advanced a section of artillery and some infantry to seize the fork of the road and, if possible Madam Porter's bridge over the Teche. Before 12 o'clock this was accomplished.

The bridge had been fired by the enemy, but the fire was extinguished before any great damage was done, and the negroes on the plantation were at once set to work to repair the bridge. At noon my front at Madam Porter's bridge was cleared of the enemy, and I was prepared to cross the Teche. Meantime the enemy had advanced to destroy a bridge about a mile farther down. This had been prevented by our cavalry up to this time, when I moved some infantry and artillery down to hold the bridge. I kept possession of both these bridges. I did not advance over them, in obedience of the orders of the brigadier-general commanding the division, but held these positions while my command was supplied with two days' rations. At 5 o'clock in the afternoon, the enemy having previously threatened to flank my position at the lower bridge by crossing a portion of his force at a bridge lower down, and giving relinquished the attempt, he disappeared entirely from my front at both bridges. At this time I received an order from the brigadier-general commanding the division to destroy the lower bridge and cross the bayou at the upper bridge in rear of the division which was about to cross. I obeyed the order, and long after dark reached the upper bridge, crossed it with difficulty (it having broken down during the passage of the artillery over it) and took up position as directed.

This brigade moved the next morning immediately in rear of the Third brigade of this division. The brigade was in motion at 6 o'clock a.m. We had hardly advanced 1 ½ miles when firing assured us that the Third Brigade was engaged by the enemy. I immediately rode toward the front to observe what was going on, when I saw that the enemy was posted in a very strong position in the front of a skirt of wood which ran for some distance at right angles to the road on which we were moving and then ran off obliquely to the left and front of the enemy's position. The skirt of wood to the left and front had a canebrake and high grass in its front sufficient to conceal any movement which the enemy might make in that direction. The Third Brigade had hardly become engaged when the enemy appeared in the canebrake, flanking the position of our troops. At this moment I received an order through Lieutenant Otis, aide-de-camp to the general commanding this division, to move my brigade to the front. Lieutenant Otis had not been informed in what manner the brigadier-general commanding this division wished me to dispose of my brigade. I therefore directing my brigade to follow rapidly, and giving the necessary directions to stretch them well the right so as to outflank the rebel force, which, by its flank fire, was so distressing the brigade in front of me. As I moved forward the scene in the open plain in front of me was embarrassing. Two regiments of the Third Brigade were retreating in disorder and the artillery on our right was falling back, because the rebel infantry was enabled to advance upon it, owing to the confused in person and received his directions for my advance, my brigade moved over the plain, driving the enemy from all their positions, out flanking them on their left, as they had previously outflanked us on our right, capturing prisoners, forcing the wood in my front, and occupying the outer edge of that wood. Here I was ordered to halt and suppose my troops so as to hold the ground

which I had gained and more effectually to protect the right flank of our position, which was said to be threatened by the enemy. The officer commanding the Third Brigade did not occupy the outer skirt of the wood in front of him, so that the wood to form a junction with his line. The character of the wood and of the ground on our right flank made it difficult, if not impossible, to tell what the enemy was doing in that direction, and the constant reports from my front in a great degree confirmed the reports from the front of the Third Brigade that the enemy were massing their troops on our front and right for the purpose of making an attack. By command of the brigadier-general commanding the division I held the position which I now occupied for some time, and remained quiet in it. Finally I received an order to advance and clear my front. My brigade did advance until it met the advance of General Emory's division near Franklin. While the brigade was advancing the news was announced of the occupation of Franklin by the advance of that portion of the Nineteenth Army Corps which was commanded by Major-General Banks. The brigade occupied and held all the positions of the enemy before which the Third Brigade had failed. Its loss was about 7 killed and 20 wounded. It captured 70 prisoners from the enemy. This result was mainly due to the admirable conduct and advance of the Ninety-first New York Volunteers, under Colonel Van Zandt; the First Louisiana Volunteers, Colonel Holcomb, and the Sixth New York Volunteers, Lieutenant-Colonel Cassidy commanding. The other regiments of the brigade acted as supports. For on and a half hours this brigade held all the positions of the enemy unsupported by any portion of the Third Brigade, which was on its left, and which did not advance to the edge of the wood in their front until long after I had occupied the edge of the wood in my front. Their failure to do this, and the difficulties which the Sixth New York Volunteers encountered in the nature of the ground over which they advanced, caused us to lose many prisoners that otherwise must have fallen into our hands. Too much praise cannot be bestowed on the manner in which the Ninety-First Regiment New York Volunteers advanced under the command of Colonel Van Zandt. But all the regiments of this brigade did their duty in a manner which reflects great credit on officers and men. I was greatly indebted to my staff, Lieutenant Hunt, acting assistant adjutant-general; Captain Denslow, acting chief of staff; Lieut. F. M. Abbott, aide-de-camp; Lieut. Charles Dwight, aide-de-camp, and Lieutenant Matthews, volunteer aide-de-camp, for their gallantry and the assistance which they gave me.

This brigade encamped on the evening of the engagement, April 14, 1863, near the scene of the action. Next morning it marched in pursuit of the enemy, and at night encamped near Indian Village. Next day it marched to New Iberia. The scenes of disorder and pillage on this two day's march were disgraceful to civilized war. Houses were entered and all in them destroyed in the most wanton manner. Ladies were frightened into delivering their jewels and valuables into the hands of the soldiers by threats of violence toward their husbands. Negro women were ravished in the presence of white women and children. These disgusting scenes were due to the want of discipline in this army, and to the utter incompetency of regimental officers.

At night in New Iberia there was some noise and confusion in this brigade, owing to the fact that some soldiers got hold of Louisiana rum. On the morning of the 17th this brigade, in advance, started over the upper route for Vermillion Bridge. Before reaching the bridge the enemy was seen by scouts, mounted for the purpose, from the Sixth Regiment New York Volunteers. These scouts soon brought notice of wagons belonging to the enemy passing over the prairie to our left. A portion of the scouts were detached to capture their wagons. They succeeded in capturing three of them. The remainder of the enemy's train, as far as seen, amounting to about 30 wagons, was seen by these scouts. Had any cavalry with which to pursue them been with this column we could have captured them, but the scouts being our only mounted force it was impossible to make the attempt. The enemy's cavalry was also seen upon the plain and fired upon. During the cannonade at the bridge the brigade furnished sharpshooters, and also furnished supports to the batteries. In performing these duties its loss was 1 killed and 4 wounded. We remained on the 18th at the burned bridge. The following day the brigade marched to Carrion Crow Bayou. The pillage on this day took the form of shooting poultry on the open prairie. Stragglers from the front of the column fired to the rear in such a way as greatly to endanger the lives of the soldiers in rear of them. The march of the next day, April 20, 1863, brought us to Opelousas. The general conduct of the brigade, as compared with the conduct of the rest of the army, has been good during these operations. But there are worthless officers and soldiers in its ranks who have disgraced it. I must speak with commendation of the conduct of the Sixth Regiment New York Volunteers since their conduct on the way to Donaldsonville. They have surprised me in their deportment and justified the value I attached to ridding this regiment at that time of certain officers and soldiers. They have fairly won back their colors. To several officers of the brigade I have been indebted for their activity, energy, and vigilance, but I must specially mention Colonel Holcomb, of the First Louisiana Volunteers, whose services have been very valuable.

I enclose a complete list of casualties in this brigade.*

I have the honor to be, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
WILLIAM DWIGHT, Jr.,
Brigadier-General, Commanding Brigade

P.S.—I also enclose reports from the commanding officers of the regiments in this brigade, with the exception of the Twenty-Second Regiment Maine Volunteers. This regiment is on detached service, and it is impossible to get its report at present. I call the particular attention of the brigadier-general commanding the division to Colonel Holcomb thinks the enemy had two pieces of artillery at the landing at Madam Porter's plantation road. The intervals of firing and the wheel tracks did not indicate this. Again, Colonel Holcomb thinks that at the engagement at Irish Bend his regiment was in the center and the respectively on

his right and left. In truth, Colonel Holcomb's regiment acted as support to these two regiments. The Sixth and Ninety-first New York Volunteers were deployed across the whole front of Colonel Holcomb's regiment, and they did not halt until every position of the enemy was carried and held. There are other minor and insignificant inaccuracies in his report.

Very respectfully, &c.,
Brigadier-General.

WILLIAM DWIGHT, Jr.,

Capt. J. Hibbert, Jr., Assistant Adjutant-General.