

No. 138. Report of Brigadier General Jacob D. Cox, U. S. Army, commanding Ninth Corps, of the battle of Antietam.

HEADQUARTERS NINTH ARMY CORPS, Mouth of Antietam, September 23, 1862.

SIR: I have the honor to submit the following report of the movements of the Ninth Army Corps on the 16th instant, and their part in the battle of Sharpsburg on the 17th:

On the evening of the 15th instant the Ninth Army Corps, having been ordered away from the remainder of the right wing, was encamped in the rear of the extreme left of the whole line of the Army of the Potomac, close to the hills on the southeast side of the valley of the Antietam, and on the left of the road from Rohrersville to Sharpsburg. On the afternoon of the 16th the whole corps, except Willcox's division, was moved forward and to the left and front, by command of Major-General Burnside, in three columns, and took up a new position upon the slope of the ridges on the left bank of the Antietam, the center of the corps being nearly opposite the stone bridge over the stream on the above-mentioned road.

The positions assigned the divisions of the command were as follows:

The right front to be occupied by Crook's brigade, of the Kanawha Division, supported in rear by Sturgis' division; a commanding knoll in the center to be occupied by Battery E, Second U. S. Artillery, First Lieutenant Samuel N. Benjamin commanding, consisting of 20-pounder Parrott guns: the left front to be occupied by Rodman's division, supported in rear by Ewing's brigade, of the Kanawha Division, the whole of the latter division being under the command of Colonel E. P. Scammon. The columns were conducted to their positions by staff officers of the personal staff of General Burnside. The artillery of the command, except Benjamin's battery held in reserve.

Shortly after daybreak on the 17th the enemy's batteries opened upon the batteries of our line, and a brisk artillery fight began, in which Benjamin's battery and Durell's battery (the latter sent forward a little to the right of our position, under charge of Captain Rawolle, by General Sturgis) took an active part, co-operating with batteries of other corps on our right. Two of the enemy's caissons were exploded, and many of their guns silenced. The shot and shell fell thickly in our bivouac, but little damage was done us.

About 7 o'clock orders were received from General Burnside to move forward the corps to the ridge nearest the Antietam, and hold it, in readiness to cross the stream, carrying the bridge and the heights above it by assault. The command was moved forward in column as it had been formed the previous night, and promptly took position as directed, and the light artillery was ordered to cover the movement; McMullin's Durell's, Clark's, Muhlenberg's and Cook's batteries being placed on the heights to right and left and somewhat to the front of Benjamin's battery, to which a section of 20-pounders from Simmonds' battery was also temporarily attached. Willcox's division was also brought up and held as a reserve.

About 9 o'clock the order was received to cross the stream. Immediately the **Eleventh Connecticut** infantry, Colonel Kingsbury commanding, was detailed from Rodman's division to deploy as skirmishers and drive the enemy from the head of the bridge. The column on the right (Crook's brigade, of the Kanawha Division, supported by Sturgis' division) was ordered to march under cover of the **Eleventh Connecticut** and attempt to carry the bridge by assault, deploying to right and left as soon as the bridge should be carried, and taking the heights above it. The column on the left (Rodman's division, supported by Ewing's brigade, of the Kanawha Division) was ordered to cross, if possible, by a ford about one-third of a mile below the bridge, take the heights above it, and join the column crossing the bridge.

The bridge itself is a stone structure of three arches, with stone parapet above, this parapet to some extent flanking the approach to the bridge at either end. The valley in which the stream runs is quite narrow, the steep slope on the right bank approaching quite to the water's edge. On this slope the roadway is scarped, running both ways from the bridge end, and passing to the higher land above by ascending through ravines above and below; the other ravine being some 600 yards above the bridge, the turn about half that distance below. On the hillside immediately above the bridge was a strong stone fence running parallel to the stream. The turns of the roadway were covered by rifle-pits and breastworks, made of rails and stone, all of which defenses, as well as the woods which covered the slope, were filled with the enemy's infantry and sharpshooters. Besides the infantry defenses, batteries were placed to enfilade the bridge and all its approaches. The crest of the first hill above the bridge is curved toward the stream at the extremes, forming a sort of natural tete-de-pont. The next ridge beyond rises somewhat higher, though with less regularity the depression between the two being but slight, and the distance varying in places from 300 to 700 yards.

In accordance with the order mentioned above, the **Eleventh Connecticut** advanced to the stream and warmly engaged the enemy across it. Crook's brigade in moving forward was brought under so lively an infantry fire, as well as that of artillery, that it was forced to halt and open fire in return, and Sturgis' division, passing by the rear, came first to the bridge, and was ordered to cross under protection of the artillery fire. General Sturgis ordered forward the Second Maryland and Sixth New Hampshire, which charged at double-quick with fixed bayonets, but the concentrated fire upon the bridge forced them to fall back. After repeated brave efforts these regiments were withdrawn, and the Fifty-first New York and Fifty-first Pennsylvania, from the same division, were ordered up.

About the same time Colonel Crook, of the Second Brigade, Kanawha Division, succeeded in getting a section of Simmonds' battery, supported by the Twenty-eight Ohio Infantry, in position to bear directly upon the enemy's positions at the farther end of the bridge, and, aided by these guns, the fresh troops charged with great enthusiasm, bearing down all opposition, and, at 1 o'clock, planted their banner on the opposite bank. In this desperate fight in the valley, Colonel Kingsbury, of the Eleventh Connecticut, fell, cheering his men on to duty.

General Sturgis' division immediately marched over, deploying one brigade to the right and the other to the left of the bridge, and advanced up the slope, driving the enemy before

them. This division was followed by Colonel Crook's brigade of the Kanawha Division, which took position on the right.

Meanwhile General Rodman's division and the First Brigade of the Kanawha Division, under Colonel Scammon, had succeeded in crossing at the ford below, after a sharp engagement and under a heavy musketry and artillery fire, and successfully took the position assigned at the left of the line of the crest above the bridge. The three divisions of the corps at this time on the right bank of the Antietam occupied the exact positions assigned them before the commencement, except that on the right the division of Sturgis was in front, and Crook's brigade in support of it,, the order being reversed by the causes before stated.

The stubbornly contested fight at the bridge having almost exhausted the ammunition and greatly fatigued the troops engage, I sent a request to General Burnside that Willcox's division, which had been held in reserve on the left bank, might be sent over and take its place on the right front, putting Strugis' division in reserve at the head of the bridge. This was immediately ordered by General Burnside, and General Willcox came promptly forward with his command. During the interval the enemy kept up and incessant cannonade, and, having the exact range of the valley and the ravines, his shells came in very fast, annoying us a good deal and causing numerous casualties, notwithstanding the men were kept lying on the ground near the crests of the hill while the changes in the line and the partially new formation after the arrival of Willcox's division were being made.

At about 3 o'clock, the necessary changes in the line having been completed, the order to advance was received from General Burnside, and the whole force, except Strugis' division, was put in motion. General Willcox on the right, his whole division in line and supported by Colonel Crook, was ordered to move on Sharpsburg, which lay about a mile distant to the right of our front. General Rodman, supported by Colonel Scammon, was ordered to move in the same direction, first dislodging the enemy from his front, and then changing direction to the right bringing his command en echelon on the left of General Willcox. The advance was partly covered by Simmonds', Muhlenberg's, Clark's, and Cook's batteries, the other batteries of the corps being in part out of ammunition, and part being necessarily kept in position on the commanding ground on the left bank of the stream. The troops moved forward in perfect order and with great enthusiasm. On the right, General Willcox and Colonel Crook quickly repulsed the enemy and drove back their artillery, pushing victoriously forward nearly to the village. On the left, General Rodman and Colonel Scammon likewise advanced rapidly, driving the rebels before them. The enemy, however, were manifestly in much greater force than ours, and massed their troops heavily on the extreme left. This necessarily made the line of march of our left wing diverge from the course intended, and opened a gap between it and the right, which it was necessary to fill up by the troops of the second line. Batteries were accumulated against us upon the semicircular ridge in advance, and the advancing line was subject to a most trying and destructive cross-fire of artillery. The enemy now brought up stillmore fresh troops upon the left, and while General Rodman was making disposition to meet them by a change of front of a part of his command, he fell, desperately wounded by a ball through his breast. The loss of their commander at a critical period caused confusion in a portion of the division on the extreme left. The Second Brigade of his division, Colonel Harland commanding, was forced to retire after an obstinate contest, in which they suffered terribly.

Colonel Scammon, of the Kanawha Division, being ordered to make dispositions of the brigade with him to oppose the rebel force on the left, caused the Twelfth and Twenty-third Ohio Regiments to execute a perpendicular change of front, which was done with precision and success, the other regiment of the brigade (Thirtieth Ohio) maintaining its proper front. The whole line was now engaged, the supports being brought to the front, except the reserve division of General Strugis at the bridge. This was now ordered up, and came promptly, though much exhausted and weakened by its previous exertions during the day.

The mass of the enemy on the left still continued to increase; new batteries were constantly being opened upon us, and it was manifest the corps would, without reinforcements, be unable to reach the village of Sharpsburg, since the movement could not be made to the right whilst the enemy exhibited such force in front of the extreme left, and the attack both to the right and left at once would necessarily separate the wings to such an extent as to imperil the whole movement unwarrantable.

The attack having already had the effect of a most powerful diversion in favor of the center and right of the army, which by this means had been able to make decided and successful advances, and no supports being at the time available for our exhausted corps, I ordered the troops withdrawn from the exposed ground in front to the cover of the curved hill above the bridge, which had been taken from the enemy earlier in the afternoon. This movement was effected shortly before dark, in perfect order and with admirable coolness and precision on the part of both officers and men.

The line as then constituted was formed by Strugis' division in front on the left, supported by Fairchild's brigade, of Rodman's division; the Kanawha Division, under Colonel Scammon, in the center, and Willcox's division on the right. The enemy did not venture an attack upon the position, but kept up a brisk artillery fire until night-fall.

The bravery and soldierly conduct of the men was most striking, and becomes still more noticeable when it is considered that for several days they had been marching and fighting, with scarcely any rest, by night or day, and the rapidity of the movement had prevented their having any regular supplies of food, the supply train being delayed at the rear by the advance of other troops.

The batteries on the left bank of the Antietam were used not only to assist in the movement of the corps, but also were most efficiently turned upon the enemy in his attacks on the center and right of the army. They were all very well served, and the 20-pounder battery, under Lieutenant Benjamin, was especially efficient.

In their reports (which are transmitted herewith) the commandants of divisions and separate brigades speak in the highest terms of their troops, and make special mention of numbers of officers and men who distinguished themselves. These are too numerous to be named in this report, but the whole list will very shortly be published in a special order from these headquarters. I must confine myself to the expression of my great satisfaction with the manner in which all the subordinate commands of the corps were handled. The movements were accurate as those of a parade, and the systematic order with which they were executed made the spectacle in the heat of the battle a grand and imposing one. Permit me also to express my obligations to the gentlemen on General Burnside's staff for

the intelligence, courage, and unwearied industry they exhibited in the constant communication between him and the headquarters of this corps.

The casualties in the corps during the day were 2,222; of which 357 were killed, 1,742 wounded, and 123 missing.* Among numerous officers killed and wounded we have to mourn the loss of Colonel Henry W. Kingsbury, **Eleventh Connecticut**; Lieutenant Colonel A. H. Coleman, commanding Eleventh Regiment Ohio Volunteers; Lieutenant Colonel M. Clarke, commanding Thirty-sixth Regiment Ohio volunteer Infantry, and Lieutenant-Colonel Bell, commanding Fifty-first Pennsylvania. All these gallant officers were killed in the action whilst heroically leading their men, under a terrible fire of shell, canister, and musketry.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. D. COX,

Brigadier-General, Commanding.

Lieutenant Colonel LEWIS RICHMOND,

Asst. Adjt. General, Hdqrs. Right Wing, Major General Burnside Commanding