

Numbers 47. Report of Captain Preston C. F. West, Aide-de-Camp, of operations May 7.

HEADQUARTERS, May 31, 1864.

I have the honor to report that on Saturday, May 7, 1864, I was given the command of 110 infantry (veterans of the **Eleventh Connecticut**), and 37 cavalry, and directed to try and cut the railroad between Port Walthall Junction and Petersburg. Several brigades of infantry, under the command of Brigadier General W. T. H. Brooks, were to engage the enemy at or near Port Walthall Junction. Leaving the main body of General Brooks' army, after it had crossed the Bake-House, Ashton Swamp, I concealed my command not far from Portion Walthall and waited two hours or more, until General Brooks' forces were engaging the enemy. Learning from a negro guide that I could not well employ cavalry over the country in which I was obliged to go, I directed Captain Freeborn to form his troops on the left of General Heckman's brigade, and cover some country near which I had to pass. Moving slowly and cautiously on the left bank of the Appomattox River to the mouth of Swift Creek, I proceeded up it a short distance to the first passable point near which the right of the enemy's infantry pickets were posted. Leaving a reserve woods and swamps in the direction of Swift Creek bridge. About 1 mile from it, I left 40 more of my men, and with 10 men I reached the railroad, but only to find that the enemy's reserve of over 1,000 troops was there with arms stacked and drawing rations. Five minutes' thought told me it was a very risky place and I concluded to return as quickly as possible, which I did, not however, before I had secured 1 prisoner of the Nelson Battalion, of South Carolina, who was carried back. On my return to the main reserve of 60 men, I found that they had been shelled during my absence from a fort on the Appomattox River, but met with no loss.

In conclusion, I have to say that I met with no loss, but the men suffered considerable from heat and the long march. They behaved very well.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

PRESTON C. F. WEST,

Captain and A. D. C., Staff Major General Wm. F. Smith.

Lieutenant Colonel N. BOWEN,

Assistant Adjutant-General.

[Indorsement.]