

The Colored Troops at Petersburg.

The following are extracts of a private letter from an officer of colored troops before Petersburg, addressed to Mr. Vincent Collyer, of this city:

NEAR PETERSBURG, Va., August 2, 1864.

Dear Sir: I suppose ere this you have heard that our division has been engaged. The result of it has not come up to my expectations; yet under more favorable circumstances, I am sure we would have won the admiration of all. I will give you a correct detail of the action.

We have been continually notified for the last fortnight that our sappers were mining the enemy's position. As soon as ready our division was to storm the works on its explosion; this rumor had spread so wide we had no faith in it. On the night of the 29th we were in a position on the extreme left. We were drawn in about 9 P. M., and marched to General Burnside's headquarters, and closed in mass by division left in front. We there received official notice that the long-looked for mine was ready charged and would be fired at daylight next morning. The plan of storming was as follows: One division of white troops was to charge the works immediately after the explosion, and carry the first and second line of rebel intrenchments. Our division was to follow immediately and push right into Petersburg, take the city and be supported by the remainder of the Ninth and the Twenty-eighth corps. We were up bright and early, ready and eager for the struggle to commence. I had been wishing for something of this sort to do for some time to gain the respect of the Army of the Potomac. You know their former prejudices. At thirty minutes after five the ball opened. The mine, with some fifty pieces of artillery, went off almost instantaneously, at the same time the white troops, according to the plan, charged the fort, which they carried, for there was nothing to oppose them; but they did not succeed in carrying either of the lines of intrenchments.

We were held in rear until the development of the movement of the white troops, but on seeing the disaster which was about to occur we were pushed in by the flank, for we could go in in no other way to allow us to get in position; so you see on this failure we had nothing to do but gain by the flank. A charge in that manner has never proved successful to my knowledge; when it does it is a surprise.

Our men went forward with enthusiasm equal to anything under different circumstances, but in going through the fort that had been blown up, the passage was almost impeded by obstacles thrown up by the explosion. At the same time we were receiving a most deadly cross-fire from both flanks. At this time our Lieutenant-Colonel (Mr. E. W. Ross) fell, shot through the left leg, bravely leading the men. I immediately assumed command, but only to hold it a few minutes, when I fell, struck by a piece of shell in the side. Captain Robinson, from Connecticut, then took command, and from all we can learn he was killed. At this time our first charge was somewhat checked, and the men sought cover in the works. Again our charge was made, but, like the former, unsuccessful. This was followed by the enemy making a charge. Seeing the unorganized condition and the great loss of officers, the men fell back to our own works. Yet a large number still held the fort until 2 P. M., when the enemy charged again and carried it. That ended the great attempt to take Petersburg.

We were unsuccessful, yet I am confident that the valor and fighting qualities of our men are equal to any in the United States army. We will yet show it.

Our loss is full fifty per cent. throughout this division. Officers suffered more than the men. Some of our regiments have only one or two officers left for duty.