

NEAR PETERSBURG, VA., July 31, 1864.

DEAR PHOENIX:—You have probably noticed the many mysterious hints thrown out of late by the sapient war correspondents of the New York papers from this army, concerning the plans of Gen. Grant to entertain the rebels with some unexpected developments. Out here we have construed all this to mean that the aforesaid correspondents knew that the 9th corps were engaged in mining one or more of the enemy's works preparatory to an assault. Be that as it may a fort in the front line occupied by the rebels in advance of the 2d division has been mined under the engineering superintendence of Lieut. Col. Pleasants of the 45th Pa. Vols., and Saturday morning at half-past 4 o'clock the mine was exploded, burying in its ruins all but one of the guns of the fort and nearly every rebel occupying it, several hundred in number. That explosion was the signal for a terrific bombardment of all the other rebel forts and redoubts within range of the fort blown up by every available gun on our side, and for an assault upon this weakened portion of the rebel line. The entire corps was engaged supported by the 18th. It moved to the assault by brigades in columns of regiments, the 2d brigade being in the following order:—9th N. H., 31st Me., 2d Md., 32d Me., 11th N. H., 17th Vt., and 6th N. H. These works were carried with but little loss, but here the carnage commenced.

The ground in the new front was very difficult for troops to march over owing to its irregularity, being interspersed with ravines and elevations; and the blown up fort, like all the other rebel works, was so situated as to be commanded by the fire of a large number of other similar works which our guns found it wholly impossible to silence. Advance they could not and here they received a terrific fire of canister and case shot from front and both flanks. Connecting with the fort blown up on our right were two lines of earthworks, the first being the one occupied by the rebels lately as their front line, and the one to the rear (a little oblique and leading to the fort front a covered way perpendicular to the main line) much stronger with a very high parapet. Our men, exposed to such a galling fire, huddled into the basin of the late fort; and the 2d brigade extended to the right into these connecting lines, occupying, however, the sides built for the front instead of rear.—They had not remained here long, before an attempt was made with some troops to carry a battery near by that was pouring in a galling fire, but which attempt failed, the men being unable to even reach the work. Soon the rebels poured in the rear (their rear, our front,) of these two nearly parallel lines and filled the ditch on their side of the fort. A short hand to hand conflict ensued when our forces were driven out of the works with great loss, and the rebels recovered all the ground they lost in the morning.

The ground between our front line and the fort which we blew up, occupied and lost is literally occupied with dead. It looks as if a small army standing there had been stricken down without a moment's notice.

The 2d brigade, 2d division, probably suffered more than an other. It now numbers less than 600 muskets. The 17th Vt. went into the engagement with 8 commissioned officers and about 130 men. Of the 8 officers not one returned to the regiment; 3 were killed, 1 wounded and 1 taken prisoner. One enlisted man was killed, 17 wounded, and 21 are missing, many of which are supposed to have been killed or wounded and the balance are prisoners.

The regiment was under the command of Major Wm. B. Reynolds, Lt. Col. Cummings having been incapacitated for field duty for several weeks by sickness.

The following is a list of the casualties:

Maj. Wm. B. Reynolds, killed.

1st Lt. Wm. D. Martin, Co. E, killed.

2d Lt. John R. Converse, Co. H, killed.

1st Lt. ——— Needham, Co. H, commanding Co. A, wounded in chest.

Capt. Frank Kenfield, Co. C, prisoner.

1st Lt. George A. Hicks, Co. F, do.

1st Lt. Leonard P. Bingham, Co. G, do.

2d Lt. Worthington Pierce, Co. D, do.

Of the enlisted men 3 were killed, 18 wounded and in the hospital, and 20 missing.

The colors of the regiment were saved.

Every commander of a regiment in the brigade was either killed, wounded, or taken prisoner.

The destruction of the fort must have caused the loss of a large number of rebel lives. As our men entered the oval basin left by the explosion heads, arms and legs protruded above the surface, but the victims were too securely pinioned for escape.

To-day has been chiefly occupied in arranging the preliminaries of a flag of truce for the recovery of the bodies of our dead. The ground between the lines is black with them, and if the truce is unsuccessful the dead bodies will hold the lines indisputably against friend and foe.

QUOD.