

A HERO OF THE CRATER.

**THIRTY-SIX MEN BURIED ALIVE
ONLY FIVE RESCUED.**

**Capt. Geo. B. Lake of Edgefield, Visits
Petersburg With Col. McMaster
and Other South Carolinians
and Tells the Story.**

From the Edgefield Chronicle.

Edgefield, July 11.—On Friday of last week, the day after the grand reunion of Confederate Veterans at Richmond, the writer of this article boarded the early morning train for Petersburg. After an hour's run we reached the historic old town. My friend, Capt. J. G. Guignard, and myself succeeded in convincing the conductor of a two-horse team that we were too poor to be for free river coinage at 16 to 1, and procured, at a price we thought we could stand, a rider to the Crater.

After a ride of less than two miles from the Imperial hotel we stopped at the place we left 32 years ago, lacking only 27 days. It was a bright, hot day—everything quiet except the singing of the birds and the cheerful voices of the few old soldiers who, like ourselves, were visiting the Crater for the first time in the life of a generation.

Among those we found there were Col. P. W. McMaster, who so gallantly handled Steve Elliott's brigade after he (Elliott) was wounded in the terrible Crater fight, Dr. T. J. LaMotte and Capt. D. H. Sally. The two first named were in the same brigade with myself in the fight of the 30th July, 1864. There were others present who were also in the fight, but belonged to other commands.

BREASTWORKS PLOWED OVER.

All were quiet for some minutes after halting. It was a melancholy pleasure to be here again. The Crater proper looked about as was expected to see it. The breastworks to the right and left have been plowed over for a quarter of a century, but you can trace the line by the old musket caps still left where an almost continuous battle had been fought for eight months. Yes, the Crater is as natural as possible after the storms of 50 years.

The two lines of the enemy's works can still be seen in the front, but, alas, they are like a spectre—the glory has departed forever. The double lines of elegantly equipped Federal soldiers to our front, the decimated ranks of half-clad and half-starved Confederates, the Edgefield rifles, the hundreds of cannon, the mortars, like the soldiers in the cemetery hard by, are to be heard on those hills nevermore. For only a second there was a yearning to see all we had seen and hear all we had heard on those hills, notwithstanding hell itself can scarce be worse.

FIGHT THE BATTLE OVER AGAIN.

Colonel McMaster, Dr. LaMotte, myself and others present related our recollections of the Crater fight, and in the main we agreed. As to some of the details there was difference enough to show we had all been there, each one giving the story as he had seen it. I will give here some recollections of the battle of the Crater—one of the hardest fought of the war, and where men on both sides were killed with bayonets and butts of muskets where blood stood in pools, and where at one time the air was literally filled with flying missiles of death, shreds of clothing and fragments of human bodies.

GEN. BUSHROD R. JOHNSON'S REPORT.

Maj. Gen. B. R. Johnson's division were the troops in and around the battery when the terrible battle begun. I quote from his official report, written three weeks after the battle:

"Headquarter's Johnson's Division,
August 20, 1864.

"For a proper understanding of the condition of my command on the occasion of the action of Saturday, the 30th of July, 1864, it is necessary to state that on the night of the 28th of July every man in reserve in this division was placed in the trenches, Colquitt's brigade of Hoke's division was temporarily transferred to my command, in exchange for Gracie's brigade, and placed on my right. For the purpose of relieving Field's division from the trenches my line was extended to an attenuation that was deemed barely secure against an ordinary assault. From the left to the right the brigades were stationed in the trenches in the following order, viz: Ransom's, Elliott's, Wise's and Colquitt's.

"About 4:55 o'clock on the morning of the 30th of July, the enemy sprung a large mine under that portion of my line about 200 yards north of the Baxter road, known as Pegram's salient. In this salient there were four guns of Capt. Pegram's battery, and the 18th and 22nd South Carolina regiments of Elliott's brigade occupied the parapets in the battery and adjacent to it. The 22nd South Carolina regiment extended from a point some 70 yards to the right of the right gun to a point beyond, but near to the left gun of the battery. The 18th was posted on the left of the 23d South Carolina regiment.

"The regiments of Elliott's brigade were distributed along the parapets from left to right as follows, viz: The 26th, 17th, 15th, 22nd and 23d South Carolina regiments. To strengthen Pegram's salient a second line of trench cavalier had been thrown up in its rear, commanding our front line and the enemy's works at a distance of from 150 and 200 yards. Owing to the extension of our line, already explained, our troops occupied only the front line of works."

WHERE CAPT. LAKE'S MEN WERE PLACED.

In the last sentence Gen. Johnson makes an error. The evening before the mine was sprung, or possibly two evenings before, Col. Dave Fleming, in command of the 22nd South Carolina regiment—I do not know whether by command of Gen. Stephen Elliott or not—ordered me to remove my company, Company B, 22nd South Carolina, into the rear line immediately in rear of Pegram's four guns. I had in my company one officer, Lieut. W. J. Lake of Newberry, S. C., and 31 enlisted men. This rear line was so constructed that I could fire over Pegram's men on the attacking enemy.

TUNNELING UNDER PEGRAM'S SALIENT.

The enemy in our front had two lines of works. He had more men in his line nearest our works than we had in his front. From this nearest line to us he tunneled to and under Pegram's salient, and deposited in a magazine prepared for it not less than four tons of powder, some of their officers says it was six tons. We knew the enemy was mining, and we sunk a shaft on each side of the 4-gun battery 10 feet or more deep, and then extended the tunnel some distance to our front. We were on a high hill, however, and the enemy 510 feet in our front, where they began their work, consequently their mine was far under the shaft we sunk. At night when everything was still, we could hear the enemy's miners at work. While war means kill, the idea of being blown into eternity without a moment's warning was anything but pleasurable.

THAT TERRIBLE SATURDAY MORNING.

On that terrible Saturday morning, July 30, 1864, before day had dawned, after the enemy had massed a large number of troops in front of our guns, the fuse which was to ignite the mine was fired. The enemy waited fully an hour, but there was no explosion. There was but one explanation—the fuse had gone out. A brave Federal officer, whose name I do not know, volunteered to enter the tunnel and fire it again, which he did. THE EARTH TREMBLED FOR MILES AROUND.

A minute later there was a report which was heard for miles, and the earth trembled for miles around. A crater 155 feet long, 97 feet in breadth and 30 feet deep was blown out. Of the brave artillery company, 22 officers and men were killed and wounded, most of them killed. Hundreds of tons of earth was thrown on the rear line, in which my command was.

A WHOLE COMPANY BURIED.

Here was the greatest loss suffered by any command on either side in the war. Myself, my only lieutenant, W. Y. Lake, and 21 enlisted men were all buried, and of that little band 31 were killed. Lieut. Lake, myself and three enlisted men were taken out of the ground two hours after the explosion by some brave New Yorkers. These men worked like beavers—a great portion of the time under a fearful fire.

BURIED THIRTY FEET DEEP.

Col. Dave Fleming and his adjutant, Dick Quattlebaum, were also in the rear line only a few feet from my left, and were buried 30 feet deep; their bodies are there still. I do not know how many Federal troops stormed the works, but I do know that the Confederates captured from them 19 flags. The attacking columns were composed of white men and negroes; sober men and men who were drunk; brave men and cowards.

ANOTHER VISION OF SUDDEN DEATH.

One of the latter was an officer high in command. I have lost his name, if I ever knew it. He asked me how many lines of works we had between the Crater and Petersburg, when I replied, "Three." He asked me if they were all named. I said, "Yes." He then said, "Don't you know that I know you are telling a d—n lie." I said to him, "Don't you know that I am not going to give you information that will be of service to you?" He then threatened to have me shot, and I believe but for the interference of a brave Federal officer he would have done so.

DEATH TO ADVANCE AND DEATH TO RETREAT.

I had just seen several of our officers and men killed with bayonets after they had surrendered, when the enemy, who had gone through the Crater towards Petersburg, had been repulsed, and fell back into the Crater for protection. There was not room in the Crater for another man. It was death to go forward or death to retreat to their own lines. It is said there were 3,000 Yankees in and around the Crater, besides those in portions of works adjacent thereto.

MAJOR HASKELL'S DEATH-DEALING MORTARS.

Then the Coehorn mortars of the brave Major Haskell and other commanders of batteries turned loose their shells on the Crater. The firing was rapid and accurate. Some of these mortars were brought up as near as 50 yards to the Crater. Such a scene has never been nor ever will be witnessed again. The Yankees at the same time were using 140 pieces of cannon against our works occupied by Confederate troops.

ELLIOTT'S BRIGADE LOST 278.

Elliott's brigade in the day's fight lost 278 officers and men. Major General B. R. Johnson's division, Elliott's brigade included, lost in the day 922 officers and men. This was the most of the Confederate loss.

FEDERAL TOTAL LOSS OVER 5,000.

While the enemy acknowledged a loss of from 5,000 to 6,000 men—and that I am sure is far below their real loss—I make another quotation from Major General B. R. Johnson's official report:

CONFEDERATES KILL 10 TO 1.

"It is believed for each buried companion they have taken a tenfold vengeance on the enemy, and have taught them a lesson that will be remembered as long as the history of our wrongs and this great revolution endures."

Virginians, Georgians, North Carolinians and others who may have fought at the Crater, none of you have the right to claim deeds of more conspicuous daring over your Confederate brethren engaged that day. Every man acted well his part.

ALL THE CANNON RECAPTURED.

What about the four cannon blown up? you ask. One piece fell about half way between the lines of the opposing armies, another fell in front of our lines, not so near, however, to the enemy, a third was thrown from the carriage and was standing on end, half buried in the ground inside the Crater, the fourth was still attached to the carriage, but turned bottom side up, with the wheels in the air, and turned against our own men when the enemy captured it. That day, however, they all fell into the hands of the Confederates again, except the one thrown so near the enemy's works, and in time we regained that also.

CAPT. LAKE A PRISONER.

Before the fighting was over the Yankee officer who could curse a prisoner so gallantly ordered two soldiers to take charge of and carry me to their lines, no doubt believing that the Confederates would succeed in recapturing the Crater. We had to cross a plain 610 feet wide that was being raked with rifle balls, cannon shot and shell, grape and canister. It was not a very inviting place to go, but still not a great deal worse than Haskell's mortar shells, that were raining in the Crater. In two seconds after leaving the Crater. I had the pleasure of seeing one of my guards die. The other conducted me safely to General Patrick's headquarters. Patrick was the Yankee provost marshal.

When I was placed under guard near his quarters he sent a staff officer to the front to learn the result of the battle.

"THEY HAVE WHIPPED US LIKE HELL."

After a short absence he galloped up to General Patrick and yelled out: "We have whipped them."

Patrick said: "I want no foolishness, sir."

The staff officer then said: "General, if you want the truth, they have whipped us like hell." Geo. B. Lake