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Letter from Burton A. Harrison to General W. S. Featherston. 7 November 1862

Burton A. Harrison

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Richmond, Va., Sept 25th, 1862.

Maj Sorrel,
A. A. G., Maj Gen. Longstreet's Division,

Sir:—

I submit the following Report showing the action of my Brigade at the battle of Manassas Plains, fought on the 30th day of August last. At an early hour on the morning of the 30th, my Brigade was posted near a fence about a half a mile west of the main road running to the village of Groveton, uniting with Gen. Jackson's command on my left, at the rail road embankment. Gen. Pryor's Brigade was placed on the right of mine, and Gen. Wilcox's a short distance in the rear to support the other two. The other Brigades of Gen Longstreet's Division continued our line of Battle to the right, and extending a considerable distance beyond the turnpike running through Groveton. Immediately in our front and extending a considerable distance to our right, was an old field from a half a mile to a mile wide. The other troops remained in position from an early hour in the morning until about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. While in this position, my Brigade was subjected to a very heavy fire from the enemy's artillery, which was placed in the woods on the opposite side of the field lying in our front. Two of our batteries, placed on a hill about the centre of my Brigade, and just in the rear,

upon our troops, and directing a rapid, heavy and destructive fire ~~upon~~ upon the right and left of our lines. At this time, Gen. Wilcox, who had, as senior Brigadier, been directing the movements of his Brigade, Gen. Pryor's and mine, was ordered by Gen. Longstreet to move rapidly with his Brigade to the right, ^{of our line} to the support of Gen. Hood. This left me the senior Brigadier on the left of our lines. Very soon after, Gen. Wilcox left with his Brigade, Major Walton, of Gen. Longstreet's Staff, announced to me that Col. Thomas, commanding a Brigade of Gen. Jackson's Division, had been sent to reinforce me, and that other troops were coming up for the same purpose. Gens. Pender and Archer very soon arrived with their Brigades, and I immediately directed my Brigade to be moved to the left, so as to extend beyond the enemy's right, and Gens. Pender and Archer to form on the right of my Brigade. This was promptly done. Col. Thomas' Brigade was held in reserve, with one regiment of Gen. Pryor's. As soon as our line was formed, an advance was ordered. The whole line moved forward in rapid and gallant style. The enemy fled, after the first well-directed fire, through the woods in the direction of the stone house. All the pieces of their artillery, ^{which they had there in immediate use} were left upon the field and captured. These Brigades continued to march in pursuit of the enemy. Passing through a skirt of woods, they reached another field,

some three quarters or a mile wide, on the farther side of which the enemy were discovered again in line of battle, with one or two pieces of artillery placed upon a commanding eminence, which were turned upon our troops as soon as they made their appearance. These Brigades were again put in line of battle in the edge of the woods, and Col. Thomas was directed to move with his Brigade to the left of our line to prevent a flank movement by the enemy, and their reinforcements from coming up a road running on our left and extending in front to the turnpike near the stone house. These dispositions having been made, our lines advanced. The enemy fled precipitately, doing us no injury except with their artillery, and scarcely returning the fire of our infantry. Having driven them from this position, any farther movement was prevented by the darkness of the night. It was now fully dark, and our troops bivouacked upon the ground until morning.

The enemy's artillery was served with great skill and effect upon our troops during the entire engagement, to which our greatest loss on the left must be attributed. Our troops, whose conduct came under my observation, behaved with great coolness and courage during the whole engagement, which lasted about four hours.

The Dixie Battery, under command of Capt. Chaplain, attached to my Brigade, was placed to the left of the turnpike near the village of Groveton, where it

returned the enemy's fire during the most of the time.

The enemy were observed during the forenoon passing down the turnpike from the direction of the stone house and filing to the right and left of our lines. About 3 o'clock, p. m., one Brigade was seen emerging from the woods on the opposite side of the field advancing in the direction of Gen Jackson's right and my left. The advance was steady and unchecked under a very heavy fire of the batteries supported by my Brigade, as well as from others placed on the left and right of the turnpike road. This Brigade ^{of the enemy} was followed by two others, ^{not more than} under ^{fifty yards from each other} the same heavy fire of our batteries, ^{all of} which advanced to within forty or fifty yards of our lines. Here they came to ^a halt, and returned the fire of our infantry for about 30 minutes, when they commenced the retreat across the field in great confusion. The fire of our artillery upon the retreating foe was rapid and destructive. As soon as the retreat commenced, our troops were ordered to advance. One of Gen. Jackson's Brigade advanced on our left, and my Brigade, Gen Pryor's and Gen Wilcox's, moved forward in line of battle on its right. He reached the ^{woods} ~~road~~ in front, and passed through the skirt of woods over six hundred yards wide, when we came to another old field, some half a mile or three quarters in width. Here we found, on the opposite side of the field, the enemy drawn up in line of battle with several pieces of artillery turned.

performed good service during the day.

When Gen Milcox left the field and the command of the troops on the left devolved upon me, I placed the command of my immediate Brigade under Col. Posey who was the senior Colonel present.

To the members of my staff who were with me on the field, Capt. Parkdale, Lt Parker, and Capt. C. N. Featherston, I feel indebted for their efficiency and promptness in executing my orders.

The list of the casualties in my Brigade, is herewith transmitted, as well as lists of those who particularly distinguished themselves during the engagement; all of which is respectfully submitted.

H. S. Featherston,

Brigadier General
Commanding.

Report of Brig.
Genl. W. S. Beathurst
of the battle of
Manassas Plains
fought Aug. 30th 1862

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