



Sons of Confederate Veterans The Hunley Torpedo



The Lt. Dixon – CSS Hunley Camp # 2016 of Sparks, NV

Number Two

Website: www.dixon-hunley.org

March / April 2009

Camp Report

The Lt. Dixon – CSS Hunley Camp welcomes its newest member. He is:

Mike Allgeier

Additionally, we had one reinstatement last month—Craig Beck. Craig was one of our charter members from January 2003. Numerous others have recently declared their intention to renew membership—let's hope they follow through. We are not far away from our prior peak membership.

Back from Tennessee

Compatriot Lance Kramer moved back recently from Tennessee. He intends to renew his membership with us when he finishes his officer training with the Nevada Corrections Department. He is now at the academy in Carson City for this purpose. Lance formerly retired in the same capacity with the California Department of Corrections in Susanville, CA. Many of you remember Lance from previous meetings when he would bring his banjo and play the old songs for us. And during his tenure as head of the Confederate Brigade, he supplied the honor guard at Confederate Memorial Day. From all of us here: Welcome back, Lance!

Adjutant's Report

Jim White reports that we have on hand in our bank account the sum of \$565.22.

Looking Ahead!

On June 20th, we will be visited by Curt Tipton, Field Representative of the ATM / SCV.



Confederate Memorial Day

It will be on Saturday, April 18th at 11:00 a.m. at the Masonic Chapel in Reno.

Next Meeting

It will be in May; its location is as yet undetermined. Confederate Memorial Day will take place in lieu of our meeting this month.

Eureka!

Last month in March, a photograph of Ernie Zebal's Confederate ancestor, Henry L. Zebal, was discovered. H. L. Zebal served in the Washington Artillery in New Orleans and was wounded at Blackburn's Ford (First Manassas in 1861) and a second time at Williamsport, Maryland on July 6th 1863 during the retreat from Gettysburg.

Private Henry Louis Zebal, Company One, Washington Artillery, Louisiana. He died in 1905 and his widow, Adele Morgan Zebal received a Confederate pension.



The Battle of Cold Harbor General Grant's Biggest Mistake

The Battle of Cold Harbor is remembered as one of American history's bloodiest, most lopsided battles. Thousands of Union soldiers were slaughtered in a hopeless frontal assault against the fortified troops of General Robert E. Lee. Grant said of the battle in his memoirs "I have always regretted that the last assault at Cold Harbor was ever made.

The battle caused a rise in anti-war sentiment in the Northern states. Grant became known as the "fumbling butcher" for his poor decisions. It also lowered the morale of his remaining troops. Many prominent writers, historians and teachers have expounded that the war was lost after Gettysburg and Vicksburg. This battle is just one of many fought following those disasters over the following two years that proved the hypothesis to be wrong. The war was not lost until the very end and only because Lee called it "quits." Immediately after the Battle of Cold Harbor, General Grant asked newspaper reporters to refrain from telling the complete story due to the effect it might have on northern sentiment to end the war.

Background:

Grant's Overland Campaign had been underway since May 4, 1864. Grant had been soundly defeated at the Battles of the Wilderness and Spotsylvania Court House in which he had lost twice as many Union soldiers as did the Confederates under General Lee. And from those battlefields Grant withdrew his forces. However many recidivist historians still portray those battles as a draw.

After each of these major engagements, Grant maneuvered the Army of the Potomac (formally under the command of Maj. Gen. George G. Meade but under Grant's direct supervision) around Lee's right flank and headed to the southeast. Lee received notice that reinforcements were heading Grant's way from Bermuda Hundred. The 16,000 men of Maj. Gen. William F. "Baldy" Smith's XVIII Corps were withdrawn from Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler's Army of the James at Grant's request, and they were moving down the James River and up the York to the Pamunkey. Lee correctly assessed that if Smith moved due west from White House Landing to Old Cold Harbor, the extended Federal line would be too far south for the Confederate right to deal with it. To deal with this, Lee's Army of Northern Virginia had 59,000 men to contend with Meade's and Grant's forces numbering 108,000. Cold Harbor was not a harbor, but really a crossroads where Burnett's tavern was located.

June 1st 1864: At 6:30 p.m., the attack that Grant had ordered for the morning finally began. Both Wright's and Smith's corps moved forward. Wright's men made little progress south of the Mechanicsville Road, which connected New and Old Cold Harbor, recoiling from heavy fire. North of the road, Brig. Gen. Emory Upton's brigade of Brig. Gen. David A. Russell's division also encountered heavy fire from Brig. Gen. Thomas L. Clingman's brigade, "A sheet of flame, sudden as lightning, red as blood, and so near that it seemed to singe the men's faces." Although Upton tried to rally his men forward, his brigade fell back to its starting point.

To Upton's right, the brigade of Col. William S. Truex found a gap in the Confederate line, between the brigades of Clingman and Brig. Gen. William T. Wofford, through a swampy, brush-filled ravine. As Truex's men charged through the gap, Clingman swung two regiments around to face them, and Anderson sent in Brig. Gen. Eppa Hunton's brigade from his corps reserve. Truex became surrounded on three sides and was forced to withdraw, although his men brought back hundreds of Georgian prisoners with them.

By dark, the fighting petered out. The Union assault had cost it 2,200 casualties with little to show for them besides capturing 750 prisoners. Several of the generals, including Upton and Meade, were furious at Grant for ordering an assault without proper reconnaissance.

June 2nd 1864: Although the June 1st attacks had been unsuccessful, Meade believed that an attack early on June 2nd could succeed if he was able to mass sufficient forces against an appropriate location. He and Grant decided to attack Lee's right flank. Anderson's men had been heavily engaged there on June 1st and it seemed unlikely that they had found the time to build substantial defenses. If the attack succeeded, Lee's right would be driven back into the Chickahominy River. Meade ordered Maj. Gen. Winfield S. Hancock's II Corps to shift southeast from Totopotomoy Creek and assume a position to the left of Wright's VI Corps. Once Hancock was in position, Meade would attack on his left from Old Cold Harbor with three Union corps in line, totaling 31,000 men: Hancock's II Corps, Wright's VI Corps, and Baldy Smith's XVIII Corps. Also, convinced that Lee was moving troops from his left to fortify his right, Meade ordered Warren and Burnside to attack Lee's left flank in the morning "at all hazards."

Hancock's men marched almost all night and arrived too worn-out for an immediate attack that morning. Grant agreed to let the men rest and postponed the attack until 5 p.m., and then postponed it again until 4:30 a.m. on June 3rd. But Grant and Meade did not give specific orders for the attack, leaving it up to the corps commanders to decide where they would hit the Confederate lines and how they would coordinate with each other. Nor had any senior commander reconnoitered the enemy position. Baldy Smith wrote that he was "aghast at the reception of such an order, which proved conclusively the utter absence of any military plan." He told his staff that the whole attack was, "simply an order to slaughter my best troops."

Robert E. Lee took advantage of the Union delays to bolster his defenses. When Hancock departed Totopotomoy Creek, Lee was free to shift the division of Maj. Gen. John C. Breckinridge to his far right flank, where he would once again face Hancock. Breckinridge drove a small Union force off Turkey Hill, which dominated the southern part of the battlefield. Lee also moved troops from Lt. Gen. A.P. Hill's corps, the divisions of Brig. General's William Mahone and Cadmus M. Wilcox, to support Breckinridge, and stationed cavalry under Fitzhugh Lee to guard the army's right flank. The result was a curving line on low ridges, 7 miles long, with the left flank anchored on Totopotomoy Creek, the right on the Chickahominy River, making any flanking moves impossible.

June 3rd 1864: Lee's engineers used their time effectively and constructed the "most ingenious defensive configuration the war had yet witnessed." Barricades were erected of earth and logs. Artillery was posted with converging fields of fire on every avenue of approach, and stakes were driven into the ground to improve the accuracy of gunners' range estimates. A newspaper correspondent wrote that the works were, "Intricate, zig-zagged lines within lines, lines protecting flanks of lines, lines built to enfilade an opposing line. It was a maze and labyrinth of works within works." Heavy skirmish lines suppressed any ability of the Union to determine the strength or exact positions of the Confederate entrenchments.

Although they did not know the details of their objectives, the Union soldiers who had survived the frontal assaults at Spotsylvania Court House seemed to be in no doubt as to what they would be up against in the morning. Many were seen writing their names on papers that they pinned inside their uniforms, so their bodies could be identified. **One blood-spattered diary from a Union soldier found after the battle included a final entry: "June 3, 1864, Cold Harbor. I was killed."**

At 4:30 a.m. on June 3, the three Union corps began to advance through a thick ground fog. Massive fire from the Confederate lines quickly caused heavy casualties, and the survivors were pinned in place. Although the results varied in different parts of the line, the overall repulse of the Union advance was the most lopsided defeat since the assault on Marye's Heights at the Battle of Fredericksburg in 1862.

The most effective performance of the day was on the Union left flank, where Hancock's corps was able to break through a portion of Breckinridge's front line and drive those defenders out of their entrenchments in hand-to-hand fighting. Several hundred prisoners and four guns were captured. However, nearby Confederate artillery was brought to bear on the entrenchments, turning them into a death trap for the Federals.

Breckinridge's reserves counterattacked these men from the division of Brig. Gen. Francis C. Barlow and drove them off. Hancock's other advanced division, under Brig. Gen. John Gibbon, became disordered in swampy ground and could not advance through the heavy Confederate fire, with two brigade commanders (Cols. Peter A. Porter and H. Boyd McKeen) lost as casualties. One of Gibbon's men, complaining of a lack of reconnaissance, wrote, "We felt it was murder, not war, or at best a very serious mistake had been made."

In the center, Wright's corps was pinned down by the heavy fire and made little effort to advance further, still smarting from their costly charge on June 1st. The normally aggressive Emery Upton felt that further movement by his division was "impracticable."

On the Union right, Smith's men advanced through unfavorable terrain and were channeled into two ravines. When they emerged in front of the Confederate line, rifle and artillery fire mowed them down. A Union officer wrote, "The men bent down as they pushed forward, as if trying, as they were, to breast a tempest, and the files of men went down like rows of blocks or bricks pushed over by striking against one another." A Confederate described the carnage of double-canister artillery fire as "deadly, bloody work." The artillery fire against Smith's corps was heavier than might be expected because Warren's V Corps to his right was reluctant to advance and the Confederate gunners in Warren's sector concentrated on Smith's men instead.

The only activity on the northern end of the field was by Burnside's IX Corps, facing Jubal Early. He launched a powerful assault that overran the Confederate skirmishers but mistakenly thought he had pierced the first line of earthworks and halted his corps to regroup before moving on, which he planned for that afternoon.

At 7 a.m., Grant advised Meade to vigorously exploit any successful part of the assault. Meade ordered each of his three corps commanders to assault at once, without regard to the movements of their neighboring corps. But all had had enough. Hancock advised against the move. Smith, calling a repetition of the attack a "wanton waste of life," refused to advance again. Wright's men increased their rifle fire but stayed in place. By 12:30, Grant conceded that his army was done. He wrote to Meade, "The opinion of the corps commanders not being sanguine of success in case an assault is ordered, you may direct a suspension of further advance for the present." Union soldiers still pinned down before the Confederate lines began entrenching, using cups and bayonets to dig, sometimes including bodies of dead comrades as part of their improvised earthworks.

Estimates of casualties for this one day's gruesome work were about **7,000 for the Union side**, no more than **1,500 for the Confederates**.

June 4th-12th: Grant and Meade launched no more attacks on the Confederate defenses at Cold Harbor. Grant wired Washington that he had "gained no decisive advantage." He later said that he regretted for the rest of his life the decision to send in his men. The two opposing armies faced each other for nine days of trench warfare, in some places only yards apart. Sharpshooters worked continuously, killing many. Union artillery bombarded the Confederates with a battery of eight Coehorn mortars; the Confederates responded by depressing the tail of a 24-pound howitzer and arcing shells over the Union positions. Although there were no more large-scale attacks, casualty figures for the entire battle were twice as large as from the June 3rd assault alone.

The trenches were hot, dusty, and miserable, but conditions were worse between the lines, where thousands of wounded Federal soldiers suffered horribly without food, water, or medical assistance. Grant was reluctant to ask for a formal truce that would allow him to recover his wounded because that would be a signal he had lost the battle. He and Lee traded notes across the lines from June 5 to June 7 without coming to an agreement, and when Grant formally requested a two-hour cessation of hostilities, it was too late for most of the unfortunate wounded, who were now bloated corpses. Grant was widely criticized in the Northern press for this lapse of judgment. The final tally of casualties for these few days were: **10,000-12,000 for the Union** and **2,500 for the Confederates**.

Top right:

Union remains being collected after the Battle of Cold Harbor.



Middle right, as seen today:

Confederate Trenches at Cold Harbor

Here Longstreet's Corps, with Breckinridge and A. P. Hill's Corps to the southward, repulsed on June 3, 1864, fourteen assaults from the East against the Confederate main line. The Federal losses, about 7,000, were the heaviest ever sustained in America in so brief an action.



Lower right:

Burnett's or the Cold Harbor Tavern as seen on June 4th 1864. Shown here it is surrounded by Union troops. Isaac Burnett, his wife Sarah and their thirteen children lived here.

