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DECEMBER 11-15, 1862.--Battle of Fredericksburg, Va.

No. 91.--Report of Brig. Gen. William H. French, U.S. Army, commanding Third Division.

HDQRS. FRENCH'S (THIRD) DIV., *SECOND ARMY CORPS,*
Falmouth, Va., December 18, 1862.

MAJOR: I have the honor to report the operations of the Third Division, Second Army Corps, right grand division, Army of the Potomac, from the 10th to the 15th instant.

On the morning of the 11th, my division left its camp, near Falmouth, and proceeded to the bridge opposite Fredericksburg, preparatory to crossing the Rappahannock that night. The Second Division having precedence, on account of the lateness of the hour, that command was the only one to cross, and mine returned to bivouac.

At sunrise on the next morning the division crossed the river by the upper bridge, and took position between the First and Second Divisions, in the town.

At 9.30 a.m. on the 13th instant, I received a circular order from the headquarters of the right grand division, through Second Army Corps headquarters, directing me to move with my division by the Telegraph and Plank roads; drive the enemy back, and carry the batteries on the heights. The divisions were ordered to attack in column by brigades, covered by a strong line of skirmishers. Having made the necessary preparations, at 11 a.m. I sent to the general commanding the corps to report that my division was in readiness.

At 12 m. I received orders to attack, and the movement at once commenced. The heights to be carried were about three-quarters of a mile outside of the town, crowned by batteries, with rifle-pits and walls beneath, forming a continuous line of defense. The skirmishers, under the command of Col. John S. Mason, Fourth Ohio, debouched from the town rapidly, the right wing deploying to the left and the left wing deploying to the right as soon as they crossed the bridges of the canal, at the railroad depot and beyond Hanover street.

A heavy infantry and artillery fire was opened upon the line, which, however, spread itself out over the plain. Kimball's brigade, moving by the left flank, followed immediately, crossing by the depot bridge, and, when that was cleared, it faced to the right, marching directly toward the center of the enemy's line, the left resting on the Telegraph road. The Third Brigade, under Col. J. W. Andrews, First Delaware, followed Kimball, and the Second Brigade, under Colonel Palmer, One hundred and eighth New York, followed that.

The column of attack was now complete, the head of which had not ceased steadily to advance, until the First Brigade arrived in front of the enemy's rifle-pits, at short musket range. The skirmishers, having driven the enemy to cover, were met with a terrible fire on the front and flanks, and compelled to lie down, slightly protected by the undulations of the plain. The brigades, shattered by the fire to which they were exposed, filled up the serried lines of the First Brigade, and poured their fire into every part where the enemy appeared. The length of time required to cross the bridges, and the extent of the plain to be crossed under the fixed batteries and covered ways of the enemy, permitted the columns of attack to be so reduced as to be unable to make a serious impression upon the works to be carried. Still, the heads of the columns rushed on up to the very walls, melting away before superior numbers, in strong positions. My troops now covered themselves to the right and left of the front of attack, opening a cross-fire upon it,

with such execution as to slacken its fire.

Hancock's division, following mine in order, and contending against the same difficulties, steadily came up. At my request, he re-enforced the part of my line of skirmishers which was holding the houses to the right and farthest to the front. I had asked permission of the general commanding the corps, through Captain Morgan, his chief of artillery, to place a section of rifled guns in a commanding position at the head of Prince George street. These were furnished by Arnold's Rhode Island Battery, and handled with judgment and precision, strengthening my right of attack at a moment when the enemy were massing a column for a charge.

My division was on the field four hours, and retired only when relieved by fresh troops. It was most effectually supported by Hancock and Howard, commanding the First and Second Divisions. The major-general commanding the Second Corps, by his presence and direction, under a destructive fire, concentrated the efforts of these divisions to second my own.

Brigadier-General Kimball was wounded while gallantly leading his troops to charge on the first line. The loss of this distinguished officer was severely felt by myself and the division during the remainder of the day. His brigade consisted of the Seventh West Virginia, Fourteenth Indiana, and Twenty-fourth and Twenty-eighth New Jersey, the Fourth and Eighth Ohio being in the line of skirmishers.

His staff, Capt. E. D. Mason, assistant adjutant-general, and Lieutenants Swigart and Burrill, were conspicuous for coolness and courage. The line of skirmishers was composed of the Fourth and Eighth Ohio and First Delaware Regiments. Colonel Mason directed its operations with great judgment and bravery. After General Kimball was wounded, Colonel Mason conducted the First Brigade. The Third Brigade (Max Weber's), under command of Colonel Andrews, First Delaware, was composed of the Fourth and Tenth New York, with the One hundred and thirty-second Pennsylvania. The Second Brigade, under the command of Col. O. H. Palmer, consisted of the Fourteenth Connecticut, One hundred and eighth New York, and One hundred and thirtieth Pennsylvania. These brave commands were put into action under a terrible fire, and moved forward in the positions I had assigned to them. The battery of light 12-pounders, Company G, First New York Artillery, commanded by Capt. John D. Frank, and Battery G, First Rhode Island Artillery, commanded by Capt. Charles D. Owen, were more immediately under the command of corps chief of artillery, and performed most active and efficient service.

I call to the special notice of the general commanding the gallant conduct of Col. H. I. Zinn, One hundred and thirtieth Pennsylvania Volunteers. This officer, conspicuous for his valor at Antietam, was killed while carrying the colors of his regiment to the front, after the standard-bearer had fallen. Colonel Wisewell, Twenty-eighth New Jersey, was severely wounded, bravely leading his regiment; Colonel MacGregor, Fourth New York, distinguished in previous battles, was also wounded; Lieutenant-Colonel Perkins and Major Clark, Fourteenth Connecticut, were both wounded while leading their men, and Colonel Bendix, Tenth New York, and Colonel Snider, Seventh [West] Virginia, were struck down while exhibiting an example of intrepidity under a murderous fire.

The list of killed and wounded of my division is the evidence of where it was. Officers and men nobly did their duty under circumstances such as few battle-fields have ever presented.

My personal staff, First Lieut. Joseph W. Plume, New Jersey, and First Lieut. William H. French, jr., Rhode Island, aides-de-camp, communicated my orders intelligently and calmly. Lieutenant Russell, Tenth New York, aide-de-camp, appointed on the field, I have to thank for

the manner he performed that duty.

Surgeon Grant organized his hospital with distinguished ability, and was indefatigable in the discharge of his onerous duties. Under no circumstances have I noticed the wounded more skillfully or rapidly relieved.

Captain Buntin, acting division quartermaster; Captain Queen, assistant commissary of subsistence, and Lieutenant Hale, Fourteenth Connecticut, ordnance officer, conducted their respective departments with energy and zeal.

In the absence of Brigadier-General Kimball and Colonel Andrews, First Delaware, commanders of brigades, their reports cannot be supplied. Colonel Palmer's report is inclosed, together with the reports of regimental commanders, to which I respectfully invite the attention of the general commanding. Lists of killed and wounded also accompany this report. (*)

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

WM. H. FRENCH,

Brigadier-General, Commanding Division.

Maj. FRANCIS A WALKER,

Assistant Adjutant-General, Hdqrs. Second Army Corps.