

Numbers 165. Report of Lieutenant Colonel John H. Anderson, Eighth Tennessee Infantry

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CAMP NEAR SHELBYVILLE, TENN.,

January 12, 1863.

GENERAL: Below you will please find a report of the part taken by the Eighth [Tennessee] Regiment in the late action before Murfreesborough:

On the morning of December 29, the regiment was ordered into line of battle. We were placed in line of battle in an old field on the west side of Stone' River, my left resting on the left of the Wilkinson turnpike road, in which position we remained subjected during the time to heavy cannonade of shells, which did but little or no harm, until Wednesday morning, the 31st, at which time I received orders to hold my regiment in readiness to move forward at a moment's notice to the support of Brigadier-General Chalmers' brigade, which was in our front. At about 10 o'clock our brigade was ordered forward. The Eighth moved off promptly at the command, under a very heavy cannonade of shot and shell. When we had arrived at the position formerly occupied by General Chalmers' brigade, we were ordered to halt and lie down behind the little fortification constructed by his brigade of logs and rails. We remained in this position about twenty minutes under a perfect storm of shot and shell, causing considerable mortality in my regiment. In this position we lost 15 or 20 men killed and wounded. It soon became apparent to every one that Chalmers' brigade was giving way, for it was with great difficulty that I could keep his men from running over my men; they came running back in squads and companies, and I am satisfied that before we left this position that at least two-thirds of the regiment that had formerly occupied the position we were in had returned. We were then ordered forward to the charge, which was responded to by the Eighth Regiment with a yell, the gallant Colonel Moore leading. We moved forward at a double-quick, under a perfect hail of shot, shell, and grape, when we arrived at the burnt brick house. The regiment was thrown into some confusion, caused by the house and some picket fence and a portion of Chalmers' men that had remained behind the house, there being several fences and the house and a portion of Chalmers' men that were in the way, causing some four of the companies on the right of the regiment to pass around and through the best way they could. At this juncture the enemy in our front opened a terrible fire upon us with small-arms, at a distance of about 75 or 100 yards. Such a fire I do not suppose men were ever before subjected to. At this point the colonel's horse fell, and I supposed that he himself was either killed or wounded. Seeing the condition in which the regiment was placed, with a powerful enemy in our front and on the right and left-for at this time we were then in front of the balance of the brigade, and the enemy were cross-firing me right a left-and seeing so many of my men falling around me, I ordered them forward at a double-quick with fixed bayonets. The gallant Eighth responded with a shout, and leaped forward like men ben on conquering or dying in the attempt. When we had advanced about 50 or 60

yards, and were just entering the woods in our front, the colonel came up with sword in hand. He was not killed or wounded, as I expected; it was only his horse. He had just reached the regiment again, and was urging them forward, when he fell, dead, shot through the heart with a minie ball. The enemy in our front contested stubbornly, and those on our right and left continued to pour a deadly fire into us. The enemy's first line gave way before my men; their second was brought forward, but could not stand the impetuosity of our charge, and they gave way. At this point it was reported to me that the enemy was trying to get away some artillery on my left. I immediately changed direction to the left, and charged them and captured their guns (three at one place), and went 50 yards below. We captured one more by shooting down their horses and stopped the piece. I also captured at this point about 400 prisoners belonging to the artillery and infantry, and we killed Colonel [George W.] Roberts, who was commanding the brigade, as stated to me by the prisoners.

Through the bloody charge I lost many gallant officers and men killed and wounded. The enemy in the woods in my front having come to a halt, and pouring a galling fire into us, I ordered the men forward again at a double-quick; they responded with a shout, and moved forward upon the enemy. At this point I was joined by the colors and about 100 men of the Fifty-first Regiment, who came in on my left. I ordered them forward with my men, which orders they obeyed promptly. We charged the enemy in his position in the woods, under a perfect storm of bullets, and drove him before us.

About this time I was joined by Colonel Chester in person. We then continued driving the enemy before us, when it was reported to me that they were trying to flank me on my right. I then changed direction to the right, and moved forward upon him, and struck his flank and rear, in which position I halted and gave him a deadly fire, being too weak in strength to close in behind him. About this time I heard a heavy fire to right in front of the enemy, whose flank I was upon. I sent an officer forward to see what it was, and, if it was our force, which I left confident it was, to inform the commander of my position, that he might not fire into me, and also to tell the commander to charge them at a double-quick and drive them by me, that I might shoot them down, which he did in gallant style; still, when he came up, it proved to be the Nineteenth Tennessee Regiment. I then formed on his left, and moved forward to the point, driving the enemy before us. It was then reported to me that the enemy was flanking me on my left. I immediately changed direction to the left and moved upon him, when he gave way and fled through the old field in front of the woods occupied by us when we left the other night, when we charged him to the old field through which he fled. We halted in the edge of woods, and gave him a deadly fire as he ran through the old field. The effect of that fire was apparent to every one who visited that place, for the edge of the woods and the field for 200 or 300 yards was strewn with his dead and wounded. When we were unmasked by his force, the enemy, from his batteries on the hill in our front, opened upon us a perfect hail of grape and canister, when I ordered the men back into the woods. I then fell back to the old house in the rear of the woods, to gather together the remainder of the regiment, that had somewhat scattered in the charge through the dense woods, and to get a supply of ammunition. I remained there some time, and gathered all the men that I could get up, in company with Colonels Carter and Chester, when we formed line on the right of General

Stewart's brigade. The firing in our front being very heavy, we were ordered forward, which order we obeyed promptly, and moved to the front of the woods in front of the enemy, in the old field. In this position we remained under a very heavy fire of artillery until night closed this bloody and eventful day.

Perhaps it is necessary that I should be more explicit in my explanation of my maneuvering in the woods. The reason why I had to change direction so often was that I was not supported either on the right or left. Our regiment drove the enemy in our front before this; consequently, this force on the right and left remained in their position, and when I had got in their rear it seemed as if they were flanking me; but when I changed direction to the right; as you will see in the foregoing report, I struck his flank and rear; and at that time the Nineteenth Tennessee came to my support on the right again, when I changed direction to the left. I then discovered that support had arrived on my left, and was driving the enemy on my left. It was then that I struck the enemy's flank on my left, when he was entering the old field. This force on my left I did not ascertain who it was, but supposed to be the Thirty-eighth Tennessee.

It was generally the case in battle that every regiment that passes a battery claims to have taken it. In this case there can be no dispute, as we shot down the horses attached to the guns, and captured the men belonging to the guns. It is also claimed by my men that there were two pieces more (in addition to the four that I have previously named) captured by the right of the regiment, some 75 yards to the right, making in all six pieces. These two additional pieces I did not see at the time, as I was near the left of the regiment, but I did see them afterward, and they must have been taken by my regiment, as it was the only force in these woods, and those guns, from their position, [were] covered by my regiment.

I can[not] close this report without saying a few words in regard to the gallant Colonel W. L. Moore, though he fell in that bloody charge. A more gallant and noble spirit never lived or died for his country. Loved and honored by his regiment, he fell gallantly battling for his country, and his native soil drank his blood.

It would afford me great pleasure, and be but sheer justice, to speak at length of the many noble spirits among the officers and men of my regiment who gave their lives a sacrifice to their country and native State on that memorable day, but the casualties of the regiment speak more for those noble spirits than I could write in a volume.

Respectfully, your obedient servant,

John H. ANDERSON,

Lieutenant-Colonel, Commanding Eighth Tennessee.