

Transcription

The Attack on Fort Wagner

From the *New York Daily Tribune* – August 3, 1863

It will be remembered the 54th held the right of the storming column, led by Gen. Strong, commanding the 1st brigade. The regiment went into action six hundred and fifty strong, and came out with a loss of two hundred and eighty privates and officers, being over one-third of the whole number. Among the officers the proportion is much larger. Of twenty-three who went into action but eight came out uninjured. The regiment marched up in column by wings; the first was under command of Col. Shaw in person, the second under Major Hallowell. When about one thousand yards from the fort the enemy opened upon them with shot, shell, and cannister, which kept flying through their ranks incessantly, and wounding many of their best officers. But still they pressed on through this storm of shot and shell, and faltered not, but cheered and shouted as they advanced.

When about 100 yards from the fort the Rebel musketry opened with such terrible effect that for an instant the first battalion hesitated—but only for an instant, for Col. Shaw, springing to the front and waving his sword shouted, “Forward, my brave boys!” and with another cheer and a shout they rushed through the ditch, gained the parapet on the right, and were soon engaged in a hand to hand conflict with the enemy. Col. Shaw was one of the first to scale the walls. He stood erect to urge forward his men, and while shouting for them to press on was shot dead and fell into the fort. His body was found with twenty of his men lying dead around him, two lying on his own body. In the morning they were all buried together in the same pit. The first battalion, after losing nearly all their officers, were compelled to fall back, and the second came forward and took its place, and held the position until it too lost all its officers, Maj. Hallowell falling severely wounded.

Capt. Appleton then attempted to rally all that was left of both battalions, but was compelled to give way.

Sergeant-Major Lewis H. Douglass, a son of Fred. Douglass, by both white and negro troops is said to have displayed great courage and calmness, was one of the first to mount the parapet, and with his powerful voice shouted: “Come on, boys, and fight for God and Gov. Andrew,” and with this battle cry led them into the fort.

But above all, the color-bearer deserves more than a passing notice. Sergt. John Wall of Co. G carried the flag in the first battalion, and when near the fort he fell into a deep ditch, and called upon his guard to help him out. They could not stop for that, but Sergt. William H. Carney of Co. C caught the colors, carried them forward, and was the first man to plant the Stars and Stripes upon Fort Wagner. As he saw the men falling back, himself severely wounded in the breast, he brought the colors off, creeping on his knees, pressing his wound with one hand and with the other holding up the

emblem of freedom. The moment he was seen crawling into the hospital with the flag still in his possession, his wounded companions, both black and white, rose from the straw upon which they were lying and cheered him until exhausted they could shout no longer. In response to this reception the brave and wounded standard-bearer said: "Boys, I but did my duty; the dear old flag never touched the ground."

After the main body of the regiment had been killed, wounded, or driven back, Capt. Amelio, together with Lieuts. Green, Dexter and Tucker, rallied one hundred men and held a position near the fort until 1 o'clock in the morning, when they were relieved by the 10th Connecticut, by order of Gen. Stimson. But even then they did not retire to the rear, but remained in the front and brought off a great number of wounded, who would otherwise have fallen into the hands of the enemy.

The Ironsides and Monitors are still over the bar, and lying abreast Fort Wagner. Shots are fired at intervals of half an hour every day, but beyond throwing clouds of sand into the air but little damage is done to this formidable earthwork.

The iron-clad fleet is slowly increasing. We shall soon out-number the original one with which DuPont attacked Sumter.

Admiral Dahlgren seems inclined to pursue a more cautious policy than his predecessors, but whether he will gain anything by it time alone will determine.