

'About the Battle of Allatoona.'

AN EXPLANATION MADE.

NEW ORLEANS, La., Dec. 22, 1866.

EDITOR KENNESAW GAZETTE:

I notice in your last issue an article in reference to the Confederate attack upon Allatoona, October 5, 1864, and some remarks by a Federal soldier, to the effect that he did not think Gen. French's course, so far as the conduct of the attack and its after results were concerned, was justified by sound military principles.

Inasmuch, however, as you expressed a desire for the truth of history, I think I can give your readers some information which you appear to be in quest of.

Without writing an extended article, I will modestly state that I have been in position to know some of the facts about the attack upon Allatoona, and the reasons governing the movement thereto.

First, in regard to the matter of tearing up the railroad track north of Allatoona. General French was ordered by General Hood to go to the Etowah river and burn the railroad bridge at that point, and fill up the deep cut at Allatoona with logs, rails, dirt, etc., as he passed by. Not one word was said by General Hood, in the order, about Allatoona being fortified; not one word about there being a garrison at that point, and not one word about its being the storehouse for an immense amount of army supplies. All concurrent history proves that General Hood was in absolute ignorance of the fact that there were any fortifications, a garrison, or a haversack full of rations stored at Allatoona.

Furthermore, his sending only one division of his army to Allatoona, instead of sending a corps, was in itself evidence that he did not know that Allatoona was fortified, or that there was anything there worth going after. His sole aim in sending Gen. French off on this expedition was to destroy the Western & Atlantic bridge across the Etowah river.

General French arrived at Acworth during the afternoon, and was informed there by two young ladies whom he met, directly from Allatoona, that that point was fortified and garrisoned by certain regiments whose numbers were estimated at nearly 900 men, which corroborated the information he had obtained just before starting on the expedition.

At Acworth he obtained a boy for a guide, and, anticipating a probable movement from the north to reinforce the garrison, he sent a body of cavalry to tear up the railroad at a point near the Etowah river.

The worthless commander of this squad of cavalry never removed one rail, because, as he reported, he had no tools. Had he performed the duty General French's forethought imposed on him, General Corse would not have reached Allatoona the night of October 4, with his brigade. Gen. French supposed, however, that his orders had been carried out, and did not suspect that the small garrison had been reinforced until after the attack commenced, when he learned it from the prisoners captured.

Arriving at Allatoona at midnight, in almost Egyptian darkness, in the mountain woods the guide lost his way, and there was no alternative but to halt the command until dawn. Soon after light the troops were assigned their positions for the attack, and the garrison (supposed still to be small) was summoned to surrender. There was no time for General French to seek all the elevations which might possibly command the redoubts, and

plant batteries thereon, and thus besiege the garrison in the fortifications; besides, it was not necessary, considering his information about the strength of the garrison.

When the garrison was summoned to surrender, Major D. W. Sanders, General French's adjutant-general, carried the note to the fort and delivered it to the officer, who went inside with it. He remained some time longer than directed, waiting for reply, and none being handed him, he at length returned to the Confederate lines.

Therefore, what you term "the defiant answer" which General Corse returned to French never reached French, and French never saw it or heard of it until after the war; and, as above stated, he made the attack with the full belief that he was assaulting only Tourtellotte's three or four regiments, numbering less than 900 men.

His own force, by the way, when he left Acworth, numbered about 2,200 men, or possibly barely more; but he had left at Allatoona creek a Texas regiment and one piece of artillery, under Colonel Andrews, to capture the block house which commanded the railroad bridge. This force kept up a fire on the block house all day, and it

supplies for the whole army under General Sherman. Had this been known, doubtless the troops would have burned them without orders.

But deeming it only an ordinary depot for supplies, the men refrained from destroying them, as they wanted some of them badly for themselves. Even the sutler's stores were not plundered, because they, too, were already in possession of the attacking troops.

However, when the forces were being withdrawn, General French ordered the stores to be set on fire. Finding this was not executed, a party of volunteers was directed to return under the now full fire from the fort and set the stores on fire.

But so destitute were the Confederates of the ordinary conveniences of life, that only three or four matches could be obtained, and they were found in the vest pocket of General Cockrell, now U. S. Senator from Missouri.

The party reached the stores, the matches failed to ignite, and thus their destruction was prevented. The magnitude of the supplies in store was a matter of after information. Had that been known it would have become an object to destroy them at all hazards, as they could not have been removed.



did not surrender until it was attacked on General French's return from Allatoona. So you see General French's forces scarcely more than equalled the Federals, who were in their strong fortifications.

I know that it has been usually stated by the Federal writers on this subject, that General French's force numbered from 4,000 to 7,000; but the truth is that his division numbered but 4,000, in round numbers, when it joined General Johnston's army at Cassville, May 18th, 1864; and the official reports show that in the fighting from that period till the fall of Atlanta, it had lost 228 men killed, 1,059 wounded, and 479 missing—total 1,766. As it had received no reinforcements, no elaborate figuring is necessary to prove its approximate numbers in the battle of Allatoona.

The assault was made with great courage and with persistent energy, and was kept up from 8 o'clock a. m. until in the afternoon.

The Confederates were in possession of the houses containing the stores; but they had no information of the amount in store, nor any conception that they constituted a great depot of

wish to go to New Hope church. What road shall we take?"

His reply was: "You will have to go back nearly to Allatoona bridge and then turn to the right, and take the road to that place."

General French told him that he did not want to go back, and wanted to know if there was any other road; but the boy replied that there was not.

He then asked the guide if the command could not cross the country, passing over Pumpkinvine creek. The reply was that they could not do it with wagons; the men might ford it, but the wagons and artillery would have to take the main road back.

You therefore see that Gen. French had no information which led him to believe that he could get to New Hope church and comply with Hood's orders to join him there, unless he went back from Allatoona towards Acworth. He had never been to Allatoona Pass, and it is probable that none of the men in his command had, unless they passed that way in falling back from Cassville.

Furthermore, even if he had determined to take the Cartersville road, and see if it did not fork north of Allatoona, and send off a branch south of the Etowah river towards New Hope church, it would have been impracticable, because this road led immediately through the Federal fortifications, and it would have been impossible for him to carry his wagon train through them; and any one who knows the topography of the country around Allatoona is aware of the fact that it is very mountainous; and Gen. French's forces had no time to cut a road outside of the range of the guns of the redoubts and go across to the Cartersville road north of Allatoona. This would have been an all day task; whereas, it was only one of few hours to go back towards Acworth, pick up the command left at Allatoona creek bridge, and take the road that led to New Hope church.

One word more: General Corse dispatched at 2 p. m., after the fight was over, that he could "whip all hell yet." This is rich; but the fact is that Gen. French remained at Allatoona until about 4 p. m. with the artillery, long after the infantry had left for the bridge at Allatoona creek, and during that time not one human being was seen to venture outside the fort, and as he then remarked to another officer, in words still strong in memory: "A silence like the pall of death rests over Allatoona. It is as lifeless as a graveyard at midnight."

How easy, yet how unjust it is, to criticise often, as time throws light on military movements. The true test is to judge of them only by the light and knowledge then before the participants.

For instance, a prisoner told General French they had no water in the fort at Allatoona. That, I presume, was the truth. A critic would say that the Confederates should have remained and the garrison would have been forced to capitulate. But how was General French to know they had no water? Another said their ammunition for the artillery was about all expended. But how was Gen. French to know that? But adversely—after the Missouri and Texas troops were withdrawn from around the fort, we who were with General French saw there on the ridge in easy rifle range quite half an hour before the Mississippi troops joined us from the north side. Why were we permitted to remain there as quietly as if we were a "picnic" party? This was on the ridge to the west of the fort. I saw but one man injured during this time. H

At about noon the Confederates had expended nearly all the ammunition which they had upon their persons, and it was necessary to send back to the wagon train to get more. This train had been toiling over the mountain roads, and at that time was about a mile south of Allatoona. While a detachment of men had gone back to bring a fresh supply of ammunition, a courier, sent by General Armstrong, informed General French, at 12:15 p. m., of the approach of a column of Federals from the south to the relief of the garrison, and stated to him that this column, heavy in numbers, had passed Big Shanty at 8 o'clock a. m., and was already well on its way towards Acworth when observed some couple of hours before.

General French read the message, and it was plain to be seen that the Federal garrison was signaling to Gen. Sherman or other officer at Kennesaw, and that nothing prevented Sherman from coming up behind French in overwhelming numbers.

General French, therefore, took the boy who was his guide to one side and said to him:

"When we capture this place I shall

was walking proudly along with a pair of new boots on that he had helped himself to out of the stores, when a rifle ball struck him in the head and he fell dead at our feet.

Now, if the Federals could "whip all h—l yet," why did they not drive us away? This was from 2 p. m. till about 2:30 p. m. The truth probably is that other matters claimed their attention, and they were not inclined to disturb us. Then, again, why was General Cox so dilatory that, leaving Big Shanty before 8 a. m., he did not reach Allatoona creek that day, when the roar of cannon in his front sounded in his ears all the day long? I do not think it is over nine miles from Big Shanty to Allatoona creek? And so one might go on. No doubt General Cox then presumed that Hood with his army was near or at Allatoona, and he felt his way very cautiously. So you see with the light of subsequent events criticism is very easy, but often unjust.

Now, Mr. Editor, I have not written these words with any desire to provoke hard feelings, or to bring about a hot discussion; but I have had in mind the gratification of your desire for giving the people the truth of history regarding the army operations along the line of the Western & Atlantic Railroad.

No one has a right to object to this. On the contrary, the American people, with, as you have termed it, their customary frankness and fair-mindedness, at this late day, do not take much stock in attempts to cover up the facts.

I believe there is an evident desire for ascertaining the truth of the great struggle wherein our people were arrayed against each other. The Federal soldiery in Sherman's army certainly fought well; but so did the Confederate troops, and I think it is the desire of the soldiery on both sides that the facts should be stated.

I honor General Corse and the brave men under him for the desperate defense they made, and made successfully; but I also honor the brave boys in gray, who, with inferior weapons, inferior ammunition, and almost with inferior numbers, assaulted this strong position, and, as I still believe, would have captured it but for the fact that the 23d U. S. army corps was marching to relieve the garrison, and was near at hand, and obliged Gen. French to withdraw his forces from around Allatoona.

Thanking you for the space taken by this article, I remain yours respectfully.

R. B. E.

Passengers from the Northwest who desire to go to Thomasville, and to Florida via Thomasville, should bear in mind that the sleeping cars which run over the Western & Atlantic Railroad, leaving Louisville at 8:30 a. m., arriving at Jacksonville at 7:35 the evening of the next day, are the only ones which pass through Thomasville in the day-time.

Their arriving time at Thomasville is 12:50 p. m., and, after allowing time for dinner, departure is made from Thomasville at 1:40 p. m., arriving at Jacksonville at 7:35 as above stated.

All who desire to go in through palace and buffet sleeping cars without change to Thomasville should bear this fact in mind.

The Kennesaw Route (W & A. R. R.) from Chattanooga, Tenn., to Atlanta, Georgia, is the most popular road in the South. The equipment and train service is of the best, and, passing through a region made famous during the war, it is also justly called the scenic route.—*Real Estate World*, Chicago and Grand Rapids.