



✓ History

of the

One Hundred and Fortieth Regiment
Pennsylvania Volunteers

BY

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HISTORIAN

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tion of the assault by General Miles, the commander of the Brigade with which the One Hundred and Fortieth was connected, in his latest work entitled, "Serving the Republic." This the writer is very confident will be read with more than ordinary interest by the men who served under him in the First Brigade, and later in the First Division of the Second Army Corps.

Marching from its position near Po River, under cover of night, our division formed *en masse* with two brigades in front and two in rear, or forty men deep; the Second and Third Divisions in two lines on the right and left; the last brigade moving into position and, without a halt, forming what is tactically called "double column on the centre." Thus we moved forward in the gray of the morning for one of the most desperate assaults ever made. It was impossible to see but a few yards in front of us and, without skirmishers or advanced lines, the troops moved in a solid mass over the undulating ground up to where they suddenly came upon the pickets of the enemy, who fired their rifles and then retreated back to their lines. The fire was not replied to. The men had been ordered to remove the caps from their loaded rifles and use nothing but their bayonets until they had gained the enemy's position.

The column moved steadily on, passing as best it could over the obstacles of felled trees and cut brush, until it came in front of the intrenched line of battle with a strong line of *chevaux-de-frise* in front, that at first seemed impassable; yet the momentum of this column, forty men deep, all crowding forward, was irresistible. On reaching the *chevaux-de-frise* thousands of strong men literally raised it up and tore it to pieces and rushed under or over it to the line of works with their bayonets fixed. It was the first time during the war that I had actually seen bayonets crossed in mortal combat; it was a crash and a terrible scene for a few moments. The superior numbers of the Union assailants soon overpowered the Confederate defenders, who had

* In his description of this assault, General John B. Gordon, of the Confederate Army—"Reminiscences of the Civil War, page 27—says: "In all its details, its planning, its execution and its fearful import to Lee's Army, this charge of Hancock was one of that great soldier's most brilliant achievements.

held to their position with great pertinacity. They had been able during that time to load and discharge their rifles three times into the great mass of Union troops, where every shot took effect in the heads or shoulders of the advancing men. The same was done with the batteries of artillery; the guns were fired three times before they were captured.

As the Union column swept *en masse* over the fortifications, the Confederates threw down their arms. General Steuart and Johnson with four thousand Confederate soldiers, thirty stand of colors and twenty pieces of artillery were captured.

The assaulting column pressed forward through the broken line for some distance, and was then met by a counter-charge. The ground was fought over by the troops charging back and forth for *ten hours* of that day, and presented a spectacle of horror without a parallel. Probably on no other one field of like area of the great Civil War did as desperate fighting and heavy loss occur. During that time the infantry fire was so terrific that standing trees were cut down by musket balls alone, and one solid oak, twenty-two inches in diameter, was cut down entirely by the infantry fire during the engagement. Its stump is now in the National Museum at Washington. Batteries attempting to go into action were completely disabled and thrown into a disordered mass by the drivers and horses being killed, and the bodies of men who fell, killed or wounded on the ramparts were riddled by scores of bullets. It was the only ground that I ever saw during the war that was so completely covered with dead and wounded that it was impossible to walk over it without stepping on dead bodies.

"All day long," says the historian of the Second Corps, "and even into the night the battle lasted, for it was not until 12 o'clock, *nearly twenty hours* after the command 'Forward' had been given that the firing died down, and the Confederates, relinquishing their purpose to retake the captured works, began in the darkness to construct a new line to cut off the salient. During this all-day conflict the trenches had more than once to be cleared of the dead to give the living a place to stand. A chilling rain fell during the greater part of the day and also of the night. This added greatly to the discomfort of the wounded men, many of whom had not sufficient covering to protect them from the cold."

In the above descriptions, which deal mainly with the