

# The Capture of Fort Esperanza- Official Report of Col. Washburne; HEADQUARTERS FIRST DIVISION, FIRST BRIGADE FIFTEENTH ARMY CORPS, SALURIA, Texas,

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**M**AJOR: I beg leave to submit the following report of the part taken by the First Brigade, First Division Fifteenth Army Corps, in the reduction of Fort Esperanza, on Matagorda Island.

At midnight, Nov. 27, I had succeeded, after much difficulty, in getting the whole of my force across Cedar Bayou, upon the island, and marched immediately to join Gen. RANSOM, some eight miles in advance. After a few hours' rest we moved up the island, making a very hard march through the sand of 23 miles; we camped in the night and moved in the morning for this place, my brigade, by your order, moving along the beach.

About 12 o'clock we had advanced to the light-house, and in close proximity to the enemy's works. The main portion of the command was halted, and by your order I proceeded, with one company from each of

my regiments, under the command of Capt. IRA MOORE, Thirty-third Illinois infantry, a most excellent officer, supported by the Thirty-third Illinois infantry, to reconnoitre and endeavor to find the strength and position of the enemy. Moving cautiously up the beach, we soon drove in the enemy's pickets, and our advance was safely lodged in a range of sand hills within three hundred yards of the outer work of the enemy—a heavy earthwork extending from the bay to a lagoon running from the bay on the mainland side of the island. The work was regularly laid out, about fifteen feet in thickness, and from ten to fifteen feet in height. The enemy now opened upon us from Fort Esperanza with his 125-pounder and 24-pounders, throwing shells, but with little or no effect. Having found out the position and apparent strength of the enemy, by your order I withdrew my advance.

During, the night, a heavy "norther" coming on, we were unable to do much on the 28th. During the night of the 28th, Captain MCALLISTER, of the Eighth Indiana, and Captain HULL of the Ninety-ninth Illinois, both of whom had had considerable experience in that line in the rear of Vicksburgh, with a fatigue party from each of the regiments in the brigade, under cover of the darkness, dug a rifle-pit from the sand-hills on the beach, held by us the first day, and running parallel with the enemy's works, 210 yards, in length, sufficient to cover a regiment. Sergeant GOODLANDER, of Company F. Eighth Indiana, with a small detail from the different regiments, was ordered to move at early dawn in advance of our rifle-pit; and endeavor to gain a position on the outer edge of the enemy's works. The Eighth Indiana was also moved out, and ordered to lay down in open prairie, in order to take advantage of any lodgment our advance might make. Capt. HULL, Ninety-ninth Illinois, volunteered, and accompanied the advance. The morning was bitterly cold, and our men suffered severely. Our advance moved up slowly and cautiously, took position on the outside of the work, (the inside being controlled by the enemy in the sand hills between the work and the main fort,) driving in a small picket force on the inside.

The force for protection of the work having been driven by the weather to the sand-hills, endeavored to rally and drive our

men back, but in vain. The Eighth Indiana was immediately sent forward in small detachments, so as to avoid the fire of the heavy guns of the fort, and gained a safe footing in our rifle-pits and on the enemy's works. Finding ourselves more successful than I had dared to hope. I returned to the main portion of my brigade and immediately sent Col. LIPPINCOTT his regiment to the front, with instructions to take command of the forces in front, and to advance as far as confidence would allow, and to get, if possible, a position where our artillery might be made effective, Col. LIPPINCOTT moved promptly with his command, and I soon had the pleasure of hearing from him that he had secured a good position for our artillery.

Adjutant W.W. ZENER, of the Eighteenth Indians now [???] staff was ordered in [???] up two pieces of the Seventh Michigan battery, under command of Lieut. STILLMAN, which he accomplished with dispatch. The pieces were brought up and placed in battery under a heavy fire from the fort—fortunately not very accurate; and we soon had the pleasure of seeing our shells dropping in the enemy's stronghold, and driving them from their guns. Col. LIPPINCOTT had very judiciously disposed, of the two regiments, and had previously to the arrival of the artillery advanced several companies into the sand hills in our front, driving back the enemy nearer his main work. I also ordered possession to be taken of an old work several hundred yards in our

front, and to the left and rear of the fort, which was gallantly done by Capt. MCALLISTER, Eighth Indiana, with his company. This enabled us to move our advance on the right nearer the fort.

In the meantime I had ordered Lieut.-Col. CHARLES, Eighteenth Indiana, to move his regiment to the support of the Eighth Indiana and Thirty-third Illinois, in doing which he passed under a heavy fire from the fort, but fortunately for him the enemy threw nothing but solid shot, which from their size were easily avoided, and he gained his position with the loss of but one man. Night coming on, found four companies of the Eighth Indiana and five companies of the Thirty-third Illinois in the sand hills near the fort, (725 yards, as shown by measurement;) two companies of the Eighth Indiana held the old work to our front. The balance of these three regiments held the outside of the new work. The men, although the night was raw and cold, remained upon the field and in their position. A fatigue party was detailed from the reserve regiments and proceeded to move the four pieces of the Seventh Michigan battery to the work occupied by our troops and by filling the ditch placed them in a fine position. I also ordered a portion of the Eighteenth Indiana, under Capt. LOWES, to reinforce Capt. MCALLISTER, as I believed that to be an important point. The Ninety-ninth Illinois and Twenty-third Iowa, who were held in reserve, were to move at daylight to our

position, while a general advance of the whole brigade was to take place. These arrangements were hardly completed, when, about 12 o'clock, an explosion of gunpowder in the fort warned us that the enemy were on the move. I immediately ordered an advance of the skirmishers, and found that the enemy had fled, leaving behind him his stores and ammunition, and the personal baggage of the officers. They had, however, piled a large quantity of cotton around the different magazines, after having scattered gunpowder in different places. The advance pushed on to the ferry, but were too late; the enemy had cut the rope, allowing the floating bridge to swing around upon the shore. They had also attempted to destroy it by piling cotton upon it and firing it: but our men were too close and put out the fire. Six of the eight men left by the enemy to fire the trains were captured at daylight. I moved a small force across to McHenry Island, and took possession of a small earthwork containing one 24-pounder, considerable ammunition and some garrison equipage. In Fort Esperanza we found one 128-pounder Columbian and seven 24-pounder siege guns. Two of the magazines were saved. Considerable camp and garrison equipage was in the fort, but owing to the danger from the explosions we failed to save it. My total loss was one man killed and ten wounded, among the latter Lieut. GEO. H. FIFER, Acting Aid-de-Camp, a gallant and brave soldier, who fell severely wounded

during our first reconnaissance. My officers and men behaved gallantly, showing that they had lost none of that coolness and bravery evinced by them upon the battle-fields of Pea Ridge, Frederickton, Port Hudson, Champion Hills, Black River Bridge, Vicksburgh and Jackson. Col. LIPPINCOTT, of the Thirty-third Illinois, rendered me great assistance in the advance upon the enemy's works, and displayed both courage and judgment.

Maj. KINNEY, of the Eighth Indiana, though lately promoted to the position, proved by his courage and coolness that he was well worthy of the same.

Lieut.-Col. CHARLES, of the Eighteenth Indiana, brought his regiment in fine style and good order, through a heavy fire from the fort to the support of the two advance regiments.

Col. BAILEY, of the Ninety-ninth Illinois, and Col. GLASGOW, of the Twenty-third Iowa, who were held in reserve, were both anxious to be removed to the front, and, more by accident than anything else, were thrown into the reserve. Both regiments, however, had already established their reputations as veterans, on the well-fought fields of Mississippi.

I am greatly indebted to Capt. MCALLISTER, Eighth Indiana, and Capt. HULL, Ninety-ninth Illinois, for their assistance in the digging and laying out of the rifle-pits and placing of the battery.

Lieut. STILLMAN, commanding the Seventh Michigan battery, rendered very efficient aid in discomfiting the enemy. Two guns of his battery were worked right under the fire of the guns of the fort.

My own Staff discharged their duty with fidelity, courage and ability. They are as follows:

Maj. J.H. Elliott, Thirty-third Illinois. Inspector-General and Chief of Staff.

Capt. S.H. Dunbar, Eighth Indiana, A.A.A. General.

Capt. JOHN RUESS, Eighth Indiana, A.A.C.S.

Lieut. and Adj. W.W. Zener, Eighteenth Indiana. A.D.C. and Provost-Marshal.

Lieut. Geo. H. Fifer, Thirty-third Illinois, A.D.C.

Lieut. J.G. Sever, Seventy-ninth Illinois, ordnance officer.

Maj. Ledlie, Ninety-ninth Illinois, senior surgeon, was detailed on operating board.

I would also make especial mention of Sergt. JOHN GOODLANDER, of Company F. Eighth Indiana, and private ADDISON HALLENRECK, Company K. Eighteenth Indiana, who were the first to mount the enemy's works the morning of the 29th. In mentioning the above I would not have it understood that any of my officers or men

failed to do their duty—and their whole duty.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

H.D. WASHBURNE,

Colonel commanding First brigade, First division, &c.