

Head Qts Deas Brigade Hindman's Divn
Breckenridge's Corps Army of Tenn.
Dalton Georgia Dec 8th 1863

Major,

I have the honor to submit the following report of the part taken by the troops under my command in the Battle of "Missionary Ridge."

On Tuesday Nov 24th 1863, I was put in command of the troops in the breastworks at the foot of Missionary Ridge, consisting of the halves of Vaughan's, Deas's, Manigault's, and Anderson's (Commanded by Col. Tucker) & the whole of Reynolds' brigades forming a portion of Hindman's Division, commanded by Brig. Genl. Patton Anderson, & in line as recited above, from right to left with a strong line of skirmishers, well advanced, in my front. The balance of the Division was posted on the crest of the Ridge, under the immediate command of Genl. Anderson. This formed the centre of our line of battle on Missionary Ridge, as our forces were disposed on Wednesday the 25th, my orders were to hold this position to the last.

On examination of the ground, I became satisfied that this position was very disadvantageous – especially so with the orders I had – for the reason that if the men made a stubborn resistance as ordered, & were overpowered by numbers, capture or annihilation were the alternatives; as retreat with the enemy close on us, up the steep ascent of the hill behind, would have been impossible. For this & other reasons I went to Genl. Anderson & begged that he would order the troops in the flat to the crest of the ridge, where I was satisfied a much better fight could be made.

He told me that he was satisfied of this also, & wished to make the change, but could not do so without orders. He then went to ask this permission, but the answer was "No, remain as you are." Sometime after 10 o'clock on Wednesday morning, the skirmishers along the whole front of the Division were driven in to my line, when the enemy was checked and driven back handsomely; Col. Tucker capturing a few prisoners. Subsequently, I recurred an order not to fight at the breastworks, but fall back when the enemy's line approached within two hundred yards, skirmishing up the hill, & form on the crest with the balance of the Division.

About 3 o'clock PM the enemy advanced in four lines, & the command fell back as ordered, & I resumed command of my Brigade. In a few minutes the firing along the whole front became very heavy, & at one point the enemy were advancing against me in solid columns. After a while I saw the troops a long way to my left breaking, & the enemy coming over our breastworks. After awhile one of my staff officers rode up and told me that he could see the enemy's colors on the crest of the ridge on my left: & riding a few paces, I became convinced of the painful fact: & in a few minutes they got possession of some of our artillery and opened fire on me, enfilading my lines with both artillery & small arms. At this time none of our troops could be seen on the crest of the ridge to my left as far as the eyes could reach: & the enemy had commenced forming a line of battle on our slope at right angles to our original line. About this time also, I could see three Yankee colors on my right front, where they were advancing in columns, almost up to the logs behind which the men were. Resistance now had ceased to be a virtue.

I gave the order to fall back, but rallied the Brigade again in about three hundred yds, without an effort. My intention was to move against the enemy immediately, & I had given the order to that effect when I found that my ammunition was exhausted, & my ord. train had retired across the Chickamauga after the enemy had got on our slope of the Ridge. I now sent for ammunition & moved a short distance to the rear, where I halted to wait for it, when I rec'd an order to cross the Chickamauga, "The battle had been fought & lost." I moved across the bridge in perfect good order, & formed in line of battle to hold the crossing, if it became necessary.

While acting in the two different capacities where I had the honor to command in this battle, with but few exceptions, the officers & men behaved well: and to other causes than want of courage & capacity on their part, must be attributed the disaster of that day.

Referring to the accompanying reports of Regt Commanders

I remain, Maj. very respy
Yr Obt. Svt.
Z.C. Deas
Brig. General

Maj. J.F. Wilson
A.A.G.
Hindman's Division

Transcribed by Christopher A. Baker, University of Florida, 2008.