



The 48th Pennsylvania in the Battle of the Crater: A Regiment of Coal Miners Who Tunneled Under the Enemy

Jim Corrigan

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In June 1864, Grant attempted to seize the Confederate rail hub of Petersburg, Virginia. General P.G.T. Beauregard responded by rushing troops to Petersburg to protect the vital supply lines. A stalemate developed as both armies entrenched around the city. Union commander General Ambrose Burnside advanced the unusual idea of allowing the 48th Pennsylvania—a regiment from the mining town of Pottsville—to excavate a mine, effectively tunneling under Confederate entrenchments. One of the most inventive and creative conflicts of the war, the Battle of the Crater ultimately became one of the most controversial, as an almost certain Union victory turned into an astonishing Confederate triumph. With special emphasis on the role of the 48th Pennsylvania, this history provides an in-depth examination of the Battle of the Crater, which took place during July 1864. Here, bickering between Federal commanders and a general breakdown of communications allowed shattered Confederate troops the opportunity to regroup after a particularly devastating blow to their defenses. The work examines the ways in which the personality conflict between generals George Meade and Ambrose Burnside ultimately cost the Union an opportunity to capture Petersburg and bring an early end to the war. On the other hand, it details the ways in which the cooperation of Confederate commanders helped to turn this certain defeat into an unexpected Southern achievement. Appendices include a list of forces that took part in the Battle of the Crater, a table of casualties from the battle and a list of soldiers decorated for gallantry during the conflict.

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