

Union Corps Histories - 18th Corps

Kinston; Whitehall; Goldsboro; Siege Of Washington (N.C.); Siege Of Suffolk; Quaker Bridge; Gum Swamp; Bachelor's Creek; Winton; Port Walthall; Arrow-Field Church; Drewry's Bluff; Bermuda Hundred; Cold Harbor; Assault On Petersburg, June 15th; Mine Explosion; Petersburg Trenches; Chaffin's Farm; Fair Oaks (1864); Fall Of Richmond.

On December 24, 1862, the President ordered that the troops in the Department of North Carolina should be organized into a corps and designated as the Eighteenth. These troops were stationed at Newbern, Plymouth, Beaufort, and vicinity. They included Peck's Division, formerly of the Fourth (Peninsular) Corps; also, some regiments which had fought under Burnside at Roanoke Island and New Berne. There were, also, twelve regiments of nine-months men--six of them from Massachusetts, and six from Pennsylvania--whose terms of enlistment expired in the summer of 1863. Some of these nine-months regiments had fought creditably at Kinston, Whitehall, and Goldsboro, in December, 1862, the same month in which the corps was organized.

In February, 1863, the roster showed five divisions, commanded respectively by Generals Palmer, Naglee, Ferry, Wessells, and Prince, with General J. G. Foster in command of the corps. Ferry's and Naglee's Divisions--containing sixteen regiments--were detached in February, 1863, and ordered to Charleston Harbor, where they were attached to the Tenth Corps, becoming subsequently a part of that organization. In June, 1863, the twelve regiments which had been enrolled for nine months only took their departure, their term of service having expired. In place of these losses the troops of the Seventh Corps were transferred, that organization having been discontinued August 1, 1863. With the Seventh Corps came a valuable accession of veteran material in Getty's Division, formerly of the Ninth Corps. This division had been left in South-eastern Virginia when the Ninth Corps went to the West, and had been engaged, in the spring of 1863, in the defense of Suffolk against Longstreet's besieging Army.

After the withdrawal of the enemy from the vicinity of Suffolk, there were no operations of consequence during the year 1863 in the Department of North Carolina, and the corps was left in quiet possession of the territory. There were, however, occasional reconnaissance's into the enemy's country, and some skirmishing at the outposts.

In April, 1864, the corps was concentrated at Yorktown, preparatory

to the spring campaign of the Army of the James. That army was commanded by General Butler, and was composed of the Tenth and Eighteenth Corps. The Eighteenth, as organized for this campaign, contained 15,972 officers and men present for duty, including the artillery, which carried 36 guns. It was commanded by William F. Smith, a Sixth Corps general, who had fought under McClellan, and who, later on, had achieved distinction through his successful plan of the battles of Chattanooga. The corps contained three divisions, commanded by Generals Brooks, Weitzel and Hinks, the division of the latter being composed of colored troops. Butler's Army landed at Bermuda Hundred May 6, 1864,--the same day that Grant was fighting in the Wilderness,--and a series of bloody battles immediately followed, the principal one occurring May 16th, at Drewry's Bluff. The campaign was a short one, resulting in defeat, and Butler withdrew to his original position on the James River, the corps losing in these operations 213 killed, 1,224 wounded and 742 missing; total, 2,179. General Grant then ordered the Eighteenth Corps to reinforce the Army of the Potomac, and on May 27th it moved by transports down the James and up the York River to White House Landing, from whence it marched to Cold Harbor. Hinks' Division was left behind, and in its place, two divisions of the Tenth Corps, under General Devens, temporarily attached to the Eighteenth as a third division, moved with General Smith's command, the three divisions being commanded at Cold Harbor by Generals Brooks, Martindale and Devens. In that battle the Eighteenth Corps made a gallant attack on the enemy's entrenchment's; but, like the various other corps engaged, it was obliged to abandon the assault with heavy loss, its casualties at Cold Harbor amounted to 448 killed, 2,365 wounded, and 206 missing; total, 3,019.

On June 12th, General Smith's command withdrew from Cold Harbor, and, re-embarking, sailed for Bermuda Hundred, arriving there on the 14th. On the following day the Eighteenth Corps advanced to Petersburg and assaulted the works that evening, Hinks' Colored Division gaining a partial success and capturing several pieces of artillery. This was the first time in the war in which colored troops, to the extent of a brigade, were engaged in battle.

After the failure of the assaults on Petersburg the Eighteenth Corps went into position in the trenches, and participated in the siege. It held the extreme right of the line, at which point the contending armies were nearest each other. The proximity of the enemy's pickets and the incessant firing occasioned large losses, daily, in killed and wounded.

On August 26th it was relieved by the Tenth Corps, and ordered within

the defenses of Bermuda Hundred. In the latter part of September it was ordered to the north bank of the James, where, on the 29th, the First Division (Stannard's) participated in the brilliant and successful assault on Fort Harrison, at Chaffin's Farm. At this time, General Stannard commanded the First Division, General Brooks having resigned in July; General Paine had succeeded Hinks in command of the colored (Third) division; and while at Chaffin's Farm, General Weitzel, who had been acting as chief of staff to General Butler, succeeded Ord in command of the corps. The Eighteenth, under Weitzel, was also engaged at the battle of Fair Oaks, October 27, 1864, which was fought on the old battle field of 1862.

On December 3, 1864, the corps was ordered discontinued. The white troops of the Tenth and Eighteenth Corps were organized into one corps, designated as the Twenty-fourth; the colored troops belonging to the Tenth and Eighteenth were organized as another, which was designated the Twenty-fifth. The regiments of the Eighteenth were formed into a division of three brigades, which became Devens' (3d) Division of the Twenty-fourth Corps.

As the Eighteenth Corps was to remain in Virginia with the Army, it is difficult to understand what good reason the War Department could have had for thus wiping out the honored name under which the corps had fought so long and well.

Source: "Regimental Losses in the American Civil War (1861-1865)" - William F. Fox