

Excerpts for the Memoir of Arthur Middleton Manigault  
*A Carolinian Goes to War* (University of South Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 237-242.

*Description of the Terrain Occupied at Atlanta*

For several days after the battle of [July] the 28th, we were shifted about from one position to another, hard at work all the time on intrenchments. On the fourth day, we became settled in a position which we retained during the remainder of the siege of Atlanta. It was about three or four miles from Atlanta, in a direction S.W., the Lickskillet Road being about a mile on our right, the [Sandtown] road half a mile to our left. Ours was the left brigade of the division, having on our left a Georgia brigade belonging to Clayton's Division, and a very mean one it was. The space for which we were responsible extended a distance of about 450



Poe Map of Atlanta Defenses—Manigault's Sector Highlighted

yards, the line running across a high bald hill, the two flanks reaching to some low ground on each side of it. The parapet and a redoubt for a battery of three guns ran along the outward slope towards the enemy, about 100 yards from the highest part of the hill, the ground rocky and with loose stones and broken rock. In front of us for about 200 yards the country was open and generally meadowland. Beyond this, it was open, and another hill not quite as high as the one we were on, fronted us. I am somewhat particular in my description, not that it is of much consequence, but because every feature and nook of that location is indelibly fixed on my mind, and I there spent four weeks, the most anxious, exhausting, and perilous, of any like period, during the whole course of my experience as a soldier.

*Main Entrenchment Described*

During the first two or three days after the 28th, much of our work was done in daylight; for although the enemy were in our front, yet their first lines of intrenchments, as also their picket lines, were at a considerable distance from us. Their fire consequently was not very annoying and but little attention was paid to it. They gradually worked up nearer, however, so that we were forced to do all our work after nightfall. Our works consisted of a ditch for the infantry, with the earth thrown outwards, forming an embankment of sufficient thickness to resist the three-inch rifle shot, or solid shot from the 12-pounder Napoleon of the enemy, provided it struck below the exterior crest of the work. Head logs protected the men whilst firing. A double row of palisades covered our entire front, and beyond these an almost impenetrable "abattis," varying in width from fifty to one hundred feet. In addition to this, for the last week of the time we spent there, a substantially constructed [bombproof] gave almost complete security. Owing to the fact that four batteries of guns were almost all the time playing on us, one of them enfilading almost the entire line, another very nearly doing the same, whilst from the other two, we received a direct fire, it was necessary to protect ourselves by traverses, zig-zags, and the like, in which the men showed much ingenuity. The ground in rear of our works was completely honey-combed, making it a matter of much peril for one to pass within twenty yards of the line after dark, unless pretty familiar with the locality.

*Entrenched Picket Line Described*

Our picket line consisted of rifle pits, with head logs, about fifteen feet long, with various figures; depending altogether on the situation, fifteen paces separating them, but all connected by a ditch from two to three feet deep, and about 2 or 2 1/2 feet wide. By this covered way the officers on duty could pass from post to post in comparative safety, and if necessary, reinforcements could be sent under cover from one threatened point to another. So also, when the fire of several guns was brought to bear on any rifle pit, for the purpose

of destroying it, as they, the enemy, frequently did, almost completely demolishing them one after another, the men would abandon them for the time, scattering and spreading themselves along the connecting trench. The labor for the construction of these exposed works was most often furnished by the men who were on duty on the skirmish line, a portion working whilst the others kept watch. As it was for their own protection and to their advantage to make the line as secure as possible, we never experienced much difficulty in getting the work done, although sometimes working parties were detailed specially for this duty. Of course the labor went on from night to night, always improving, enlarging and strengthening them, each relief on going out after dark carrying in the hands of every soldier a forked branch of a tree or young sapling, the leaves all trimmed off and points sharpened, so as gradually to form an "abattis." In this manner these skirmish lines presented a formidable obstruction to the enemy, and if sufficient time had elapsed to complete them, they could generally be held against four or five times as many men as occupied them. From two of these lines, we were driven successively, after many severe contests. Our third line was even stronger than either of the two first, and resisted all the efforts of the enemy to possess themselves of it; although in the brigade on our left, the skirmishers had been driven back to the breastworks, beyond which there were no pickets. On our right also the line was much retired, so that our picket works somewhat represented a salient. This was the case in each of the three instances where we constructed these works.

#### *Ammunition Expended on the Picket Line*

The fighting on the picket line was incessant, and the ammunition daily expended by our detail, consisting of about one hundred and seventy-five rifles (175) for a long time averaged rather more than six thousand rounds of ammunition daily, or about 35 rounds per man. At times the contest would be desperate and the enemy frequently repulsed, and I have more than once seen a line of battle in addition to the pickets on duty, driven back and utterly unable to advance. On both sides the shooting was very accurate, the men frequently dropping their balls between the lower part of the head log and the parapet. The slightest carelessness or imprudent exposure of one's person was sure to result in death or a severe wound. This sort of duty, coming round as it did nearly every fourth day, was particularly trying to the men, as for twenty-four hours no sleep was to be had. The mind was in a constant state of tension as well as the body, it being necessary to be ready at any moment to repel an attack, and no one knew when to expect it. It must be remembered also that in our main works we were almost as much exposed, the bullets from the sharpshooters and continued fire from the artillery forcing the men to take shelter under the works or in the ditch all day; and even at night the danger, was only a little less; excepting for an hour or two immediately after dark, when there was generally a complete cessation.

#### *Daily Losses in the Trenches*

Our daily loss varied from five men to fifty-five, the two extremes, and would average, I suppose, about ten or eleven. As a general thing more casualties occurred in the main line of works than on the picket one, which can be easily explained from the fact that in the former, owing to the greater distance of the danger, the men would become careless of exposure and move about as though there was no danger, in spite of the strictest orders to the contrary. An unfortunate cannon ball or a few well-directed rifle shots, or perhaps accidental ones, would make them keep close for some time, until its effect had worn off, when again they were as indifferent as ever. With the latter (those on picket) each soldier was on the *qui vive*. He knew full well what would be the consequence of the slightest imprudence on his part, and was constantly being reminded of the danger in which he stood. To judge from the continued firing, the deadliest hate existed between the two opposing lines, yet they would frequently call to each other, asking and answering questions, and from daily contact with each other, they knew the names of the different

brigades, regiments, and sometimes individuals, to whom attention had been called by some cause or other, each organization bearing a different reputation. Thus our men would frequently announce the fact during the night that the following would be a hard day, because such a regiment from Indiana, or some other state, was opposed to them. At another time, they would congratulate themselves on the event of some other regiment being on duty, as they were known to be averse to carrying on matters in too deadly a spirit.

#### *Cease Firing on this Pit!—an Unusual Truce*

When the ordinary skirmish firing was going on, and a man on either side happened to be killed or wounded in one of the rifle pits, his comrades would call out, "Cease firing on this pit!", would stick up his ramrod on the front of the embankment, with a piece of white cloth or sheet of paper on the upper end of it. That pit would remain unmolested until the litter bearers made their appearance and carried off the soldier, although during the time, the rest of the lines would go at it just as ever. The wounded man removed and out of range, the ramrod with its indicator would be removed, and hostilities would recommence. How this understanding was arrived at, no one could ever tell me, and how far it extended throughout the armies I do not know; but it was a very common occurrence along our division front, and was very honorable and creditable to both parties. I know that many a man's life was saved by it. It was only during this period and on this line, that I ever knew this humane arrangement to exist, and it ought to be a matter of great regret that it is not universal.

#### *Going for Water*

Whilst on duty, the men in the rifle pits, exposed as they were to an august sun the whole day, would consume a good deal of water, rendering it necessary that their canteens should be refilled. As a general rule, for any one to leave the line was an undertaking of great peril, but a Confederate soldier must have water, and will run almost any risk to satisfy his thirst. In order to lessen the danger, the following expedient was commonly adopted. It would fall to the lot of one man to take all the canteens of the others with whom he was posted. Notice would be given to the adjoining pits some distance to the right and left, that a man was going for water from No. 9 or 5, and at a given signal a quick and steady discharge would commence on the opposite rifle pits of the enemy from whom any danger was to be apprehended. The Yankees in them would lower their heads to avoid the flying balls, coming in quick succession, and there being no concert of action of their side, our men would have it all to themselves. The fellow, with a dozen canteens slung around him, would take advantage of the opportunity, spring out, and, running rapidly, in a minute or two reach a place of safety behind some swell of ground, or a thick wood, and at his leisure procure what was wanted. On his return, approaching as near as he could with safety, he would communicate his return by some peculiar cry, which his comrades hearing, they would again open on the enemy, whilst he regained his place, unhurt, and only a little out of breath.

#### *Effectiveness of Traverses under Fire*

For the first ten days of this period, I occupied with the staff officers a central position in the breastworks, spending the entire time, night and day, in the ditch of the intrenchment, only leaving it to go along the line, keeping under cover, or to attend to such duties as were necessary; and when the exposure could not be avoided, the risk was at all times great, and during the day, even a single individual, showing himself for a minute or two, would be sure to draw a fire on him, either of artillery, or from the sharpshooters. I estimated that during those ten days, at least fifteen hundred shot and shell either struck or exploded within twenty paces of where we lay. No shot ever fell immediately in our section of the work, although the traverses separating [us] from the other sections, and not more than fifteen paces apart received several balls, and men were killed on either side of us. The embankment was frequently struck, the balls either grazing the works, or burying themselves in the bank and exploding, in either instance covering us with dust and dirt, producing a sensation not very pleasant. Many fragments of rock, splinters, and a few fragments of shells fell in our section, but resulting in no serious injury to anyone.

### *The General Gets a Bombproof*

Finding our quarters very uncomfortable and far from cleanly, I determined to adopt the same plans and precautions universally followed by all other General officers, whose rank and position required that they be very near the line, which was to provide what was commonly as a "bombproof" for headquarters. A point was selected about 150 yards in rear of the intrenchments, a little in rear of the outer edge of a wood which approached the line, and taking advantage of a slight gully worn by heavy rains, with a little additional labor, in a few hours, we were comfortably fixed, and about as secure as in the breastworks. These precautions were absolutely necessary, and were universally adopted by all officers. Without them, no one's life was safe even for a few hours. The safety, however, was only comparative, and one could not be otherwise than anxious during the continuance of the siege.

*"It would have been better had my advice been taken..."*

On one occasion Lieutenant General [Stephen Dill] Lee, making a tour of the lines occupied by his corps, on reaching my brigade, sent for me to accompany him along our front. He was attended by an aide, also by Major General [James Patton] Anderson, who had been sent back to the Army of Tennessee, and had been assigned to the command of our Division. After inspecting the works and preparations made for defense, it being his first visit, he expressed a desire to get in some position where he could more distinctly see the enemy's works and proposed going a little back from the works to where the hill was higher and a good view could be obtained. The spot he pointed out was a very open and exposed one, and where, if a man showed himself for a moment, not only several rifle balls would be sent at him, but he got off well if a shot or two from a rifle cannon did no more than cover him with dust or explode within few feet of him. Being perfectly familiar with the danger myself, and knowing his ignorance of the same, and regarding myself as being somewhat responsible for his safety under the circumstances, I mentioned the danger we would incur, and suggested a point on the edge of the wood in our rear, which offered the same advantages, and where we were not so apt to be seen, or attract attention. My suggestion was declined, rather brusquely, and off we started. We soon reached the spot, Generals Lee and Anderson using their glasses to observe with greater accuracy the enemy's position. I, knowing full well what to expect, did not view the scene with much complacency, expecting every moment that one or more of us would be struck down.

Several rifle balls hummed ominously by us, and we had not been stationary more than fifteen seconds, when a severe concussion in our midst, accompanied by a cloud of dust and smoke, and the smart in several parts of the body of each of us from small fragments of rock or loose pebbles, gave notice that a shell had burst amongst us. The report of the gun, the bursting of the shell, and the horrid screech which accompanied it, were simultaneous. Fortunately, we had separated from each other a few feet. I turned to see who had fallen, but all were standing. The aide was rubbing his leg, where a stone had struck him. General Anderson was picking up his hat, and General Lee brushing from his face and neck the sand and dirt with which he had been deluged. The shell, a percussion one, had struck and exploded within six or eight feet of us. As no one had been hurt, I was not much put out by the occurrence and rather pleased than otherwise to notice the disconcerted countenances of my companions, who had rejected my counsel. I was determined to say nothing more, however, on the subject. The first shell was speedily followed by several more, fortunately not so well directed. The place was getting disagreeably hot and uncomfortable. The enemy seemed bent upon hurting somebody, and would certainly have done so in a very short time had not General Lee turned to me and remarked that it would have been better had my advice been taken, and proposed that we should seek some temporary shelter. Nothing loath to do so, I pointed out a position occupied by the infirmiry corps of one of the regiments, about twenty yards off, and into it we slid not very ceremoniously. The enemy had very likely recognized the party as consisting of officers of rank, and before we reached the excavation, three batteries were firing at us, and continued pounding away at our miserable little place of refuge for fifteen minutes, much to our annoyance, and that of the infirmiry men, who evidently did not regard us as welcome visitors.