Battle of Averasboro [1]

Battle of Averasboro

by Ronnie W. Faulkner, 2006

See: More on Civil War Battles [2] from the Encyclopedia of North Carolina | More on Civil War Battles [3]

"Battle at Black River, March 16th, 65." Photo courtesy of Library of Congress, call #: DRWG/US - Waud, no. 1028. Created March 16, 1865. [4] The Battle of Averasboro was a costly delaying action that began in Harnett County [5] on 15 Mar. 1865, near the end of the Civil War [6]. Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman's Union army of 60,000 men was moving northward from Fayetteville [7] in two columns. On 15 March Gen. Joseph E. Johnston [8] ordered Lt. Gen. William J. Hardee [9]'s 6,000 Confederate [10] troops to engage the enemy while Maj. Gens. Robert F. Hoke [11] and Daniel H. Hill [12] marched from Kinston. Johnston needed time to consolidate his forces for a major battle. About five miles south of Averasboro, Hardee deployed his troops in three defensive lines to impede Sherman's left wing.

At 6:00 a.m. the next day, in the driving rain, the Federal attack began with an artillery barrage and cavalry charge. Skirmishers were driven back, but the Confederates rallied and charged. They had the upper hand until Maj. Gen. Henry W. Slocum [13], commander of Sherman's left wing, ordered up additional infantry led by Col. William Hawley. By 11:00 a.m. the Confederate right on the first line had been turned, forcing the Rebels back to their second line of defense. At 1:00 p.m., after another Union attack, the Confederates withdrew to their third line. Union shelling continued, followed by several costly charges. At 8:00 p.m. Hardee ordered a withdrawal along the road to Smithfield, leaving Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler's dismounted cavalry to cover the retreat. At daybreak Wheeler withdrew.

The fight delayed the Union advance, but Hardee's small force was no match for Sherman's left wing. Union casualties were reported at 682 killed, wounded, and missing. Confederate casualties were, Hardee asserted, "between 400 and 500." The fight near Averasboro was only a small battle; nonetheless, it effectively stalled Slocum's advance for one day, enabling Johnston to concentrate his forces and launch a full-scale attack against the Union left wing at Bentonville three days later.

References:

John G. Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina* (1963).

Barrett, *Sherman's March through the Carolinas* (1956).

Mark L. Bradley, *Last Stand in the Carolinas: The Battle of Bentonville* (1996).

J. S. Smith, "On the Battlefield at Averasboro," *Confederate Veteran* (February 1926).

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"Battle at Black River, March 16th, 65." Photo courtesy of Library of Congress, call #: DRWG/US - Waud, no. 1028. Created March 16, 1865. Available from http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004661156/ [4] (accessed May 17, 2012).

Additional Resources:

Averasboro Website: http://www.averasboro.com/ [14]

Map of Battle: http://www.averasboro.com/History/MapofTheBattleofAverasboro/tabid/106/Default.aspx [15]

History Channel: http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/battle-of-averasboro-north-carolina [16]

NC Markers: https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?MarkerId=HH-2 [17]

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