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The Battle of the Crater: the Civil War's worst massacre

[Civil War History](#), [Sept, 1997](#) by [Bryce A. Suderow](#)

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was a life and death struggle, and for us not to take any of them, but to

load our guns, fix bayonets, and go stooped as far as we could without

being seen, and then to rise and go in among them, and give them h--; and

we tried to obey orders. Just before the job was completed General Mahone

sent orders to us not to kill quite all of them.(10)

W. A. Day of the 49th North Carolina in Ransom's brigade, Bushrod Johnson's division, described the massacre in the Crater and the murder of fugitive blacks who were hiding in the bombproofs:

They rushed up to the works which we [sic] alive with Yankees both white

and black. They halted on the brink and fired one volley into the surging

mass, and then turned the butts of their guns and jumped in among them. How

the negro's skulls cracked under the blows. Some of them run over on our

side and started for the rear, while others made a dash for their own

lines, and a great many of them made their escape. I, boy like, ran up the

line to see them. When I got there they had the ground covered with broken

headed negroes and were searching about among the bomb proofs for more, the

officers were trying to stop them but they kept on until they finished

up.(11)

It is clear that a massacre occurred. How large was the massacre? An examination of the nominal lists of casualties for each of the eight black regiments engaged, as well as the 1st and 2d brigade and the Fourth Division casualty lists, reveals that 219 officers and soldiers belonging to the Fourth Division were killed, 957 wounded, and 410 missing, a total loss of 1,305.(12)

	KIA	WIA	POW	Total
1st Brig.				
27th USCT	11	45	18	74
30th USCT	18	99	78	190
39th USCT	15	92	47	
154				
43d USCT	13	81	23	117
Total:	57	317	166	535
2d Brig.				
19th USCT	24	87	3	114
23d USCT	75	116	119	310
28th USCT	13	65	11	89
29th USCT	21	55	47	123
31st USCT	29	41	64	134
Total:	162	364	244	770
Grand Total:	219	957	410	1305

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