The Battle of the Crater

Carefully read the accounts of the Battle of the Crater. Then answer in complete sentences the questions below.

1. Describe the effects of the mine explosion.

2. According to Rev. Garland H. White, Chaplain of the 28th USCT Regiment, what were the expectations for the battle?

3. How did the editorial “The Black Troops” in Harpers Weekly defend the actions of the African-American troops at Petersburg?

How do the above pictures help you understand the battle of the Crater?
The Battle of the Crater – Document A

Scenes in the Crater at Petersburg

When our troops arrived at the crater they beheld a heterogeneous mass of loose earth, guns, and guncarriages, dead and wounded gunners, etc. Some of the gunners were buried alive at the depth of perhaps twenty feet – the depth of the mine below the fort. Those on the surface were found in every conceivable condition and attitude – some merely stunned and slightly wounded, others unrecognizable lumps of flesh and dirt; some with their heads protruding from the ruins, others with their heels marking their unhallowed burial place. One poor fellow pulling the dirt out of his eyes in his delirium, said “Have we been attacked? Are we driving them? That’s right. Give them hell!” He soon revived, however, to find himself a prisoner. Another, buried up to his armpits in loose dirt on being approached, cried: “Come, Yanks, for God’s sake take me out of this. It’s all over now, and there is use of letting a fellow stick here. Come, take me out quick, and I will do as much for you some time.” He was taken out.

One of the charging officers, noticing the dirt move near him as if a mole or gopher were at work under it, commenced digging, and finally dug out a rebel lieutenant, who was actually revived, and conversed freely with the officers before being brought from the ground. Several others were exhumed from their living graves, and restored to consciousness.

Before our wounded were removed from the crater under a flag of truce, their sufferings during the day and a half they remained in it were absolutely frightful. Their groans and cries for water could be distinctly heard in our entrenchments, without the power to relieve without a certainty of being shot. To the credit of the rebs, however, be it said, they did what they would not allow our men to do – carried water in their canteens to some of our suffering wounded, holding up their canteens as flags of truce. They allowed our wounded to make themselves as comfortable as possible by constructing little booths, such as were able to do so, or putting up little fly-tents, such as had them, but they would not allow them to approach our entrenchments.

Lafayette Daily Courier - August 11, 1864
The Battle of the Crater – Document B

Letter from the Rev. Garland H. White, Chaplain of the Twenty-Eighth United States Colored Regiment, Raised in Indiana

August 8, 1864 from Near Petersburg, Virginia

... Now, I would have the people at home, both white and colored, to understand, that the victory of that day was as certainly ours as any thing could be. I call upon all candid-hearted men, who stood and saw the affair from beginning to end, to corroborate what I say in making this statement. When I saw our colors waving over the enemy's works, I, with numbers of others, said: "Boys, the day is ours, and Petersburg is sure."

For several rods the dead lay thick, both white and colored, Union and rebel. It was a sad sight. Recollect, the colored troops went as far as they were ordered to go, and did just what they were told to do, both in going in and remaining there; and in coming out, the brave officers who led them in, when they saw that bad management had taken place somewhere, and thinking that remaining longer would endanger that portion of the army, through wisdom and good policy, ordered the retreat....

The Christian Recorder (newspaper of the African Methodist Episcopal Church)
August 20, 1864