

Newspaper article from Fort Wayne Sentinel

FROM THE FORTY-FOURTH INDIANA.

CAMP NEAR MURFREESBORO, TENN.

January 9th, 1863.

Mr. Editor-I am anxious to let your readers know something of the part taken by our own regiment in the late battle of Murfreesboro; but I am quite unwell and my letter may be brief and unsatisfactory to those most nearly concerned.

We left our camp, near the State Lunatic Asylum, six miles from Nashville, on the 26th of December, 1862, McCook's corps upon the Nolensville pike, on our right and Thomas' corps, it was supposed, upon the Franklin pike, on our left, throwing us, (Crittenden's corps) in the center, though we were properly the left wing of the "Grand Army of the Cumberland."

After three days of skirmishing in the advance, we reached, on the evening of the 29th, a point near Stones' [sic] river and about three miles from Murfreesboro, when the enemy gave evidence that they meant to make a decisive stand. Heavy skirmishing was already running along our front when we reached our position, about fifteen hundred yards in rear of our lines (our division being held in reserve and Gen. Rosecrans' Headquarters, being immediately with us) and McCook on the right was fighting hard and troubled to hold his own. On the next day, the 30th, we were still held in reserve, McCook again fighting hard all day and advancing a little; on the right of our line we had heavy skirmishing and some desperate fighting, resulting in our advancing about a thousand yards. The night was cold and storming, but it gave a respite to the weary-fighting is hard work.

The morning of the 31st broke upon us clear and bright, heavy skirmishing, some hard fighting and cannonading on our front; McCook again fighting, hurriedly, desperately and at disadvantage. We were ordered to load, and each regiment being thrown into close column of divisions, Gen. Rosecrans addressed us in person, kindly but authoritatively, to the old regiments, with eulogistic mention of past services; to the new, with hopeful expectations for the future. Soon after this we started to reinforce or relieve some point on the left but before we reached our destination, cannonading and musketry was heard in our rear, upon the pike, and to this point we repaired at double quick; the enemy had made one of their audacious cavalry charges upon our train and captured an immense amount of supplies, but before they could avail themselves of the

capture, the 4th regular cavalry charged them in turn and a few discharges from one of the batteries of our division, completed their dispersion.

In the meantime, Johnson's division of Mc [missing text] could be spared from the support of our lines, were immediately thrown into three lines of battle, forming a new front, nearly parallel to the pike and perpendicular to the right of our old front. Upon the extreme right of the first line, our regiment was placed, and we immediately advanced upon the enemy, driving in his skirmishers for a distance of twelve hundred yards and finally engaging his first line in a light, open wood, a cleared field of three hundred yards in breadth a little in our rear. Here occurred one of the most unfortunate things of the day; it appears that the enemy's line upon our right, overlapped us very considerably, and upon our advance, they fell back only upon our immediate front, thus outflanking us with a heavy force to our right and rear. The skirmishers reported the position of this force and it was a fatal mischance that we did not deploy and engage them, for no sooner had the battle fairly commenced with us in front than we received a most hel[illegible] 3 [illegible words] of musketry and grape were ordered to fall back in good order; stand at the second line was found equally impracticable, and both lines fell back to the third; here, in crossing the open field, the fire was the most terrible that ever fell on us, and though both lines were composed of veteran troops, some confusion occurred, but we rallied well on the third line, and to the credit of the 44th be it said, with more men than any other regiment of the brigade, though we had gone into action with less than any other.

All old soldiers, especially of the first line, agree in saying that they would prefer hours of the hardest Shiloh fighting, to the fifteen or twenty minutes occupied in falling back across that open field, yet the regiment seemed to be under the kind care of a protecting Providence, for the loss in proportion to the exposure was not large. My own company was particularly fortunate, and perhaps least exposed to the raking fire, being upon the left of the regiment which in the hurry of the formation was thrown rear in front.

Upon the last line we awaited a renewal of the attack, but the enemy were cautious and did not advance. Our whole line on the right was immediately reformed and strengthened, and before dark we were removed a little to the left and front in support of a battery, from which, late in the night, we were relieved and moved over to the extreme left. Here I lost the regiment; being unwell and without blanket or oil cloth, I obtained permission to go to the rear where I could have the benefit of a fire; this was New Year's Eve, and miserably enough it passed to me, in cold and bodily pain. The next morning, the regiment was gone, no one knew where; I did not learn its position until late that night and rejoined it early next morning, Jan. 2d, 1863. During my absence the regiment had had light skirmishing all day of the 1st, and in the night, the skirmishers of the

enemy, (attracted by the fires that our old soldiers will build, in the very face of a foe when it gets too cold,) thought to investigate the matter and brought on a sharp little fight with ours, from which they were soon glad to retire.

The morning of the 2d opened as usual, with cannonading and skirmishing along the line to the right; about 10 o'clock it died away to an ominous lull, broken only by occasional interchanges between adventurous skirmishers, until about 2 p.m., when it became evident that the enemy were massing upon our left, directly in our front; our lines were very light, the skirmishers were hard pressed, yet we only waited. At 3 p.m. our skirmishers were driven in and the enemy, in double column of divisions, fell on our right, the 79th Ind. next on our right, the 35th Ind. next, and the battery it was supporting, with their usual impetuosity in the charge. We all fought nobly, desperately, but soon part of the battery was captured, the rest fell back, its support fell back, the 79th fell back, the 86th on our left fell back, part of the second line fell back, and then the 44th, the last right of the first line, to give back, retired diagonally to the right and rear, formed behind a rail fence, perpendicular to our first position and poured in a gulling fire upon the enemy's flank, who, still pressing steadily forward, soon entirely passed us, and compelled another falling back to the high ground of the hospitals, where with stragglers arrested by our Lieut. Colonel and other officers, we opened a deadly cross fire upon their flank and contributed as much as any other movement at that time to the first check of their extreme right. In the meantime, bullets, canister, grape, round shot and shell, rained upon the field of retreating men, like one of your northern hail storms, and soon over the river, a thousand yards to the rear, a mass of disorganized stragglers from various regiments, some of which were completely dispersed, pressed in a column, fifteen deep, and waist high in water, to the rear of the 21st Ohio, which drawn up across the bend of the stream in the bottom, with the 44th across the stream, on the flank and other regiment held in reserve near by, gave the last and final check to the right of the enemy. The battle here, and as far to the left as I could see, was magnificent, terrible, the rattle of musketry and the roar of artillery, deafening and incessant. After twenty minutes of desperate struggle, the enemy's front reeled and fell back a little, rallied and fought, fell back a little, rallied again and were finally swept away by our charge, past our old lines, past their outer and inner defenses, losing artillery, small arms and prisoners in great numbers, until heavy darkness arrested our victorious arms. We did not join in the pursuit, some of the regiments of our division were so badly scattered that were ordered to lay over and reorganize.

The next morning, the 3rd, having gathered together as many of the stragglers as possible we were taken a little to the rear and left and again placed in reserve, the stream dividing our division, leaving us upon the same side we had fought upon the day before. Not very much was done along the lines this day; about 10 in the morning the

88th Ind. and another regiment had a hard fight of an hour and a half on the right of the center, driving in the enemy and occupying their ground. This night we passed shoe deep in mud, without blankets or oil cloths, our fires struggling feebly for existence, with the rain that almost froze as it fell. Next morning all was silence except a few challenging shots from our siege pieces, which elicited no answer. About 10 a.m. we were taken across the stream on a temporary bridge of fallen trees, there, the rumor began to circulate that the enemy had evacuated, but it was not fully credited; we had heard this prematurely reported on similar occasions, too often. In a few hours, however, doubt became certainty and though we all regretted that the final and desperate struggle had thus been only postponed, yet the happy sense of present security, after long days of danger, doubt and uncertainty, was manifest in every countenance. Two divisions, one of which was Negley's were sent in pursuit and their cannon was heard thundering upon the enemy's rear guard, late at night. They were reported to have met stubborn resistance but to have taken many prisoners and arms. We laid two nights and part of the second day on the battlefield, occupied in burying the dead, picking up stragglers, and broken stores and furniture of war, when we moved through silent and deserted Murfreesboro, to our present position, about three-fourths of mile from town, on the Lebanon pike. The casualties to our regiment will appear from the annexed official report of the killed, wounded and missing.- Our brave Col. Wim. C. Williams was taken prisoner during our fight on the left, Jan. 2d; none of the circumstances attending his capture are known to us here. I am happy to state to the friends of the old 44th, that our brigade and division commanders applauded us, as having behaved most nobly in the trying [illegible rest of the line].

It must not be understood that I propose to give anything but an outline of this great five days' battle, and generally of only that part, necessary to description of our share in it. The greater part of such a battle as this is necessarily shut out from the observation of an actual participant.

The enemy fight well; in their charges, especially, when stimulated by their usual whisky and powder, they are almost irresistible [sic]. They are handled on the field with much skill and show a most creditable degree of discipline. They were usually kind to our prisoners [missing text] [illegible] exterior, though every gesture indicates command.

The officers immediately in command of our own right, Col. Williams; Lieut. Col. Aldrich, and Acting Major, Capt. Barton, fought most bravely and efficiently, and only the more assured us in our former respect and esteem for them. During the fight of the 2d Jan. Lieut. Col. Aldrich was in command of both the 44th Ind. and 13th Ohio, as Col. Williams, though present, was too hoarse to give orders. The following is a list of the killed, wounded and missing:

Company A - Killed: None.

Wound: Private Fred Swamban, side and back, seriously; corp. Geo. W. Purvis, leg, severely; Joseph Milnes, leg, slightly.

Missing: Segt [sic] John Ulam.

Company F - Killed: John H. Webster, Jacob Parker.

Wounded [sic]: Geo H Casper, finger, slightly; Bennett S. Robe, arm, slightly; Daniel Greenwalt, leg, seriously; Lewis R. Tiffany; thigh, seriously; Aseph Harwood, arm, seriously; Chester D. Greenamyer, foot, seriously; Jacob Hicks, wrist, slightly; Francis P Robbins, arm, slightly; Francis A. Johnson, back, slightly.

Missing: Stephen Tarnar, A L Nichols, serg. [sic] Wilson Nichols, corp. Marshall Hadsell, David G Robinson, Hugh W Dirrim, Jacob Sleutz.

Company D - Killed: John D. Haller.

Wounded: Wm. Opie, arm; Wm. Rontson, hand; Amos T Britton, leg.

Missing: Sanford Worden, Charles H Higgins, Martin H Keesler, Henry Keesler, Sam'l [sic] Shanower, Ezra Worden, Ira Worden.

Company I - Killed: Serg't [sic] Frank Baldwin, Giles Drake.

Wounded: James A Smith, Martin Dauner, Fred Stroup, John Robinson, Fred Taveuir, John Lasher, M G Hurd.

Missing: Corp. A. S. Daver, Henry Messler, L A Mosey, Lorenzo Nolon, G W Kelley, Fred Johnson.

Company C - Killed: Private Jacob Smith.

Wounded: Corp. Samuel Sweet, finger, left hand; Corporal Jackson Hyser, nose, slightly; Serg'ts [sic] Owen Shaw, color bearer, left arm, slightly; and Sedgwick Livingstone, left leg, slightly.

Company H - Killed: none.

Wounded: Corp. Peter Alspach, flesh wound, leg; Privates Victor Ketcham, right thigh, seriously; John Crist, ankle, seriously; Van Buren Fisher, left leg, seriously.

Company E - Killed: none.

Wounded: Corporals A J Reed, thigh; H F Biddle, side; L A Grabel, shoulder; J D Spergin, knee; F Bants, shoulder and leg, slightly.

Company G - Killed: none.

Wounded: Private Lucius McGowan.

Missing: Privates Jefferson Shannon and Milton Edsall.

Company K - Killed: Private Harrison Harwood.

Wounded: Privates Samuel Squier, hand, slightly; Franklin Willis, foot, slightly; Orlo A Whepple, left knee, badly, and taken prisoner.

Missing: Private James Chilcote.

Company B - Killed: Private Thomas Holsper.

Wounded: Serg'ts [sic] Albert Ritz and William Cartright; Privates Wm. Clark, S W Eddy, Jno. [sic] Coyan, Gabriel M Scott, Geo. W Scott, Samuel Widner, Edward Lightfoot; Serg't [sic] Geo. Sherburn, John Deardorff, Benj. McIntyre.

Missing: John Griffith and James K Phillips.

Company A - Killed: none.

Wounded: Private Fred Swambaw.

The foregoing list is copied directly from the reports of the company officers, and is, I suppose correct, though not always very definite.

Many members of the regiment desire that this article be republished in Steuben, Elkhart, Dekalb and Lagrange county papers.

The whole number killed, wounded and missing is eighty-five. The regiment numbered on going into the first fight 27[illegible], all told.

Very respectfully yours,

Nelson A. Sowers.