

One man can make a difference

We've all seen it before. Your team is down by a couple of touchdowns late in the 4th quarter and the naysayers are all headed for the parking lot to beat the traffic. Then one player makes an incredible catch in the end-zone and immediately the team is inspired. The remaining fans began to cheer and the feeling in the stadium is electric and in a series of incredible plays the team comes from behind and wins the game.

Such scenes have happened on the battlefield as well, including here at Corinth.

On the second day of the battle, October 4th, 1862, things were not looking so good over on the Union right. The Confederate division of Brigadier General Martin Green had attacked the Northerners on either side of Battery Powell. Several regiments were driven back, some even broke and ran. Eleven cannon were captured and it looked like the whole right flank was about to crumble under the onslaught.

Lieutenant Lorenzo Immell of the 12th Wisconsin Battery was in desperate straits. The four artillery batteries to his left had been silenced and his infantry support was wavering. One of his four guns was disabled but the three remaining guns were firing double rounds of canister (a tin can filled with 27 iron balls the size of walnuts). "The enemy still advanced in great numbers," recalled Immell, "driving back our front line amid the most terrific firing all along the front line." Immell's men fired the cannon at the unheard of rate of six shots per minute.

Of all the men fighting for their lives amid the three remaining guns, one man stood out. Sergeant Samuel E. Jones, commander of the two guns on the left, was giving it all he had. Another sergeant saw what was going on and yelled out, "Lord, boys, look at Jones! Three cheers for Jones!" The 12th Wisconsin began to cheer, hollering "Huzzah! Huzzah!" and raising their hats in the air. In a flash the infantry on either side of the guns took up the call and yelled themselves hoarse.

The response was contagious; men who had turned and run heard the commotion and returned to the line to continue the fight. A battle line that had seemed about to break became as strong as steel and there was no longer any

doubt who would prevail on that part of the field. Jones' singular act of bravery and determination had inspired hundreds if not thousands.

On the opposite side of the field the fortunes of the Confederates took a turn for the worse. The resurging Federals stopped the Southern attack and began a push to reclaim the lost ground. The eleven pieces of artillery were recaptured and it seemed the Confederate line was in danger of being sent tumbling back in a rout.

Several hundred yards away from the 12th Wisconsin were the Confederate foot soldiers of the 6th Missouri Infantry. They had taken the earthwork known as Battery Powell but there were no reinforcements and it was impossible to hold on without help. They began to break under the pressure. Once again, a single man inspired his comrades when all seemed darkest.

Private William Huff was the flag bearer of the 6th and didn't carry a weapon. His sole job was to keep aloft the flag or colors, the heart and pride of the regiment. Six men were specifically assigned to protect Huff and were known as the color guard.

Why so much emphasis placed on a scrap of red cloth and gold fringe? A Civil War battlefield was a noisy place. Orders for the troops could rarely be heard if they were shouted out so the orders were amplified by the use of drums and bugles. Even these could be drowned out in the din of the fighting so men were told to keep an eye on the flag. If the flag moved forward, the line moved forward; if it fell back then the line moved to the rear as well.

The color bearer and the color guard were the bravest of the brave. They had to be for if the color bearer panicked and ran away the whole regiment was apt to follow.

During the worst of the fight at Corinth the 6th Missouri fell back in confusion, but not Pvt. Huff. He held the flag high even when a bullet hit him in the left thigh, followed quickly by bullets to his left arm, right arm, right thigh and lower leg. He refused to drop the flag even when it was stained with his blood.

He was assisted to the rear but he had done his duty; the flag was safe and the regiment would fight again under the red banner.

What happened to these two heroes? Sgt. Jones was promoted to the position of senior second lieutenant in the battery and made it through the war without a scratch.

William Huff may have saved his flag but the man himself became a prisoner of war at Corinth. He was too desperately wounded to be taken away when the army retreated and was left behind in a field hospital. As bad as he was wounded he would return to the regiment to fight again, this time wearing the uniform of an officer. "Promoted for gallantry at Corinth," 2nd Lieutenant Huff was wounded in the shoulder and captured again at Vicksburg, wounded in the mouth at Franklin, Tennessee and captured a third time near Mobile at the close of the war.

As for the flag he was carrying, it is on permanent display in the visitor center, and yes, you can still see his bloodstains.

Somebody once said that courage is not the absence of fear, just the ability to master fear. There were a great many men who mastered their fear at Corinth but few who had such an impact on others. It just goes to show you what two determined men can do when they refuse to give into despair. They can still inspire us today.