

**A Storm in the Cedars:**

## ***Colonel John F. Miller's Brigade at***

## ***the Battle of Stones River***

**By: Daniel A. Masters**

**Revised: March 29, 2005**

The advance continued into a cornfield beyond where Sergeant Bolton noticed a beautiful Rebel banner lying on the ground near him. I picked up the flag and saw it belonged to the 26<sup>th</sup> Tennessee Regiment and intended to bring it with me but at once comprehended that it was impossible to use my musket and carry the flag with me, so I hurriedly threw it down by the side of the dead Rebel where I found it. The flag was soon picked up by Private William J. Davis of the 78<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania, who turned it over to Colonel Sirwell. An elaborate story of how the flag was captured recounted that the 56-year-old Davis chased the Confederate standard bearer and shot him. Corporal William L. Hughes of Company B then bayoneted the man and the two captured the flag. It was sent back to Rosecrans with an officer of the 78<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania, the prize having an electric effect upon our men. Almost instantly soldiers sprang to their feet and cheered for the Union. Later research revealed that the 26<sup>th</sup> Tennessee's color bearer certainly had been shot, but was not bayoneted. The Pennsylvanians also captured a guidon from the 4<sup>th</sup> Florida in this charge.<sup>57</sup>

55. Gancas, Ronald S. *The Gallant Seventy-Eighth: Colonel William Sirwell and the Pennsylvania Seventy-Eighth-Stones Rivers to Pickett's Mill*. Plum Baro: Mark V Enterprises, 1997, p. 121-2.

56. United States Army. Ohio Infantry Regiment, 21st. MS 562, Box 13, Folder 2. Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University.

57. Gancas, op. cit., p. 122.

Bowling Green State University - Center for Archival Collections

**United States. Army. Ohio Infantry Regiment, 21st  
MS 562**

**Transcripts: Box 13, Folder 3--John H. Bolton to A. McMahan Aug. 14,  
1888-Sept. 12, 1889**

Findlay, Ohio August 14th 1888

Col A. W. McMahan

Toledo O.

Your esteemed favor came to hand some time ago requestion me to state to you what I know about the 26th Tennessee (rebel) Regiments colors captured by our troops at the Battle of Stone River.

Pressing business engagements and more or less absence from home prevented me from sending you a prompt reply, consequently your letter remained unanswered, but I will now relate to you briefly my recollections although the lapse of over a quarter of a century may have left its mark upon my memory as regards distance & c but the statement I here send you regarding the capture of the flag is a true one in every respect.

On the second day of January 1863 after we had crossed the river and were driving the rebels up the hill through the woods under a heavy fire, and a moment before our regiment (21st O. V. I.) captured the rebel battery, whilst advancing we were passing over large numbers of dead and wounded of both federal and confederate, and about a hundred yards as near as I can recollect to right of the rebel battery captured by our regiment and only a short distance in the woods before we entered the open field (corn field) is as near as I can describe the location where while we were advancing under a brisk fire, I saw laying on the ground before me a dead rebel with a flag by his side. I picked up the flag and saw it belonged to the 26th Tennessee Regt and intended to bring it with me, but at once comprehended, that it was impossible to use my musket and carry the flag with me, so I hurriedly threw it down by the side of the dead rebel where I had found it, and proceeded along with the Regt until we came to a halt out in the open field, when I returned to get the flag, but when I got there it had been taken away by some one else, there is no question but the color bearer fell from a shot fired by some one of our regiment but who fired that shot will undoubtedly never be known. I will here add that I honestly believe that no one person in particular is entitled to the credit of capturing that flag, but one thing is certain that the credit for the capture of it belongs to the 21st Regiment Ohio Vol Infy

Trusting the above narrator regarding my observations and knowledge of the capture of this flag may be of some advantage to you in your history I remain

Yours Truly

J.H. Bolton

## **FIFTEENTH PENNSYLVANIA (ANDERSON) CAVALRY AT STONE RIVER**

[Adjutant J.C. Reiff](#), New York.

From regimental history as there was no report filed due to loss of officers.



We received our first mount at Louisville, Ky., and marched thence to Nashville, Tenn., reaching there on the evening of Wednesday, December 24, 1862. Thursday, December 25th (Christmas) the Regiment remained in camp about one and a half miles from the city, but details were sent out as escort to a forage train and had a fight with the rebels. Friday, the 26th, was cold and dreary with a drizzling rain. The whole army was in motion for the Stone River campaign. About 11 A.M. a detachment of the Regiment started, in all about 300 men. A portion was detailed to escort a wagon train. The balance, some 200 men, reached General Rosecrans' headquarters at night on the Nolansville pike, but without the wagons. The detachment was in command of Major Adolph Rosengarten, the Senior Major, with Junior Major Frank B. Ward second in command. Lieutenant-Colonel Spencer was too ill to take the saddle, but occupied an ambulance, while Colonel Palmer was still a prisoner of war, having been captured in the Antietam campaign in September, 1862, while on a special mission, seeking to get information for General McClellan. The detachment reported directly to General D. S. Stanley, Chief of Cavalry, on the staff of General Rosecrans.

After a Pretty rough, and what was a very tedious journey, we arrived at the pike about 4 A.M., Wednesday, December 31, and soon had good fires kindled and snatched a short nap.

Meanwhile rumors came that the enemy's cavalry were in the rear of the army and captured and burned our regimental train, as well as a portion of the trains belonging to General McCook's and General Davis' headquarters.

At daylight the Regiment was ordered to escort a train to the rear and also to look after the guerillas who had burned the trains mentioned above.

It was now about 1 o'clock P.M., and, the artillery fire on our left wing was very heavy. Having marched directly across country, keeping the road as little as possible, we had, of course, but little idea of the real direction of our line, and thought the firing came from our right, instead of which, as we found later, the entire corps of General McCook was resting in our rear, we being again in the advance with the cavalry force which had started from the pike with us.

The whole movement was a perfect enigma to us, who had no idea of the close proximity of the enemy. A force was ordered into the woods on our right, and we were first sent to the left and then countermarched to the rear of the center, where we were in position to act independently or aid either flank. General Stanley now dismounted a portion of the force in the woods and they advanced rapidly for a few hundred yards, covered by the trees, when they suddenly became engaged with the skirmishers of the enemy. Reinforcements were sent by both parties and the action became very lively. Soon the enemy appeared in strong force and poured perfect volleys into the men on foot. Thinking we were confronted by a heavy infantry force.. and having no. infantry or artillery in our rear that we knew of, all our line fell back, as the enemy outnumbered us greatly. We were, however, soon in fighting trim, General Stanley cheering and begging the men not to falter. Our boys were now placed on the right, when the right and center of our little line were ordered forward. We soon became engaged, when the enemy opened with grape and canister, but fired too high, cutting the heads from the trees instead of the men. This excited the horses. We advanced to the edge of the woods, and by hard work dislodged the enemy and charged some distance after them. Their firing being very severe however, our men fell back a little hastily and soon re-formed, and although the rebels came to the edge of the woods, they soon retired. Instead of being infantry we found that they were dismounted Cavalry, some 3000 strong, with artillery.

We were now moving slightly to the left, when the rebels came out of the woods and formed in line of battle in our front, showing a force of nearly 2000, with their left in the woods. They looked extremely bold, and the red flag was waved in bitter defiance, inviting us to the attack. Our lines extended for some 800 yards in nearly a semicircle, comprising from 1200 to 1400 effective men. General Stanley was everywhere, and in a moment he saw the best that could be done was to order a charge. The enemy had already brought two pieces of artillery into position and was firing shell, though without much precision.

"Let's charge them boys! Let's charge them!" Cried the General. The Third Ohio was just to our left and rear, and to its Colonel General Stanley said: Colonel, give your men the order to charge. All was excitement, the enemy appearing so bold there was a little diffidence on our part. Where is my Seventh Pennsylvania? asked the General. The Seventh Pennsylvania by their bravery and splendid conduct had won the affection of the Generals in this department, and especially of General Stanley. They were soon found ready. "Now where is the Anderson Cavalry?" asked General Stanley. He found us exchanging shots with the enemy, as some skirmishing was going on along the whole line. The charge had not yet been made, and we having, by our behavior on the Saturday and Monday previous, gained the confidence and sympathy of the General, he said he would lead our little squadron in person, which excited the pride of our boys. With his sword waving he ordered: Forward! charge! Use your pistols and sabers, boys! Then our boys charged at a gallop to within short pistol range and fired volley after volley with carbines and pistols, emptying some saddles, The cavalry on our left charged at the same time. The rebels retreated some distance.

During this time an act of daring was performed by two of our boys which will be remembered for a long time to come. The name of one was Sergeant Henry C. Butcher, of Company B; the other Private L. B. Holt, of Company L. They saw the enemy's flag and coveted it as a prize, but to attempt its capture was to

expose themselves to our own as well as the enemy's fire. After deliberating a moment, the prize was too tempting and they rode up, shot the standard bearer, who had advanced some distance in front of his command, and brought the flag into our lines - the two men riding one wounded horse, the other being killed. It was an heroic and audacious act. It was a beautiful silk flag, belonging to the Third Alabama Battalion, and presented by the ladies of Selma, Ala.- the only flag the force carried. It was subsequently exhibited in the windows of Cornelius & Baker, on Chestnut Street, previous to its being presented to Governor Curtin, at Harrisburg.

***No.168 Report of Colonel Robert H. G. Minty , 4<sup>th</sup> Michigan Cavalry, commanding First Brigade, including skirmishes at La Vergne , December 26, between Stewart's Creek and La Vergne , December 30, at Overall's Creek, December 31, and on Manchester pike, January 5.***

HEADQUARTERS FIRST CAVALRY BRIGADE, Camp near Murfreesboro , Tenn. , January 7, 1863

SIR: I have the honor to hand you the following report of the part taken by the First Brigade, First Division of the Cavalry Reserve, in the operations from the advance from Nashville to and including the battles before Murfreesboro :

Crossing Overall's Creek, I took up position parallel to and three-fourths of a mile distant from, the Nashville and Murfreesboro road. The 4<sup>th</sup> Michigan dismounted, forming a line of skirmishers on the edge of the woods immediately in our front, out of which they had driven a large force of the rebel cavalry. They were supported by a part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Tennessee , also dismounted. Captain Jennings' battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania , and two companies 3<sup>rd</sup> Kentucky , under Captain Davis, were posted in the woods to the right and in rear of the 4<sup>th</sup> Michigan , with the 15<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania in their rear. Our entire force at this time was 950 men.

The enemy advanced rapidly with 2,500 cavalry, mounted and dismounted, with three pieces of artillery, all under the command of General Wheeler. They drove back the 4<sup>th</sup> Michigan to the line of the 1<sup>st</sup> Tennessee skirmishers, and then attacked the 7<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania with great fury, but met with determined resistance. I went forward to the dismounted skirmishers and endeavored to move them to the right, to strengthen the 7<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania, but the moment the right of the line showed itself from behind the fence where they were posted, the whole of the enemy's fire was directed on it, turning it completely around. At this moment the 15<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania gave way and retreated rapidly, leaving the battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania and the dismounted men almost entirely unsupported, and leaving them no alternative but retreat.

The rebel cavalry had followed us up sharply into the open ground, and now menaced us with three strong lines, two directly in front of my position and one opposite our left flank, with its right thrown well forward, and a strong body of skirmishers in the woods to our right, and threatening that flank.

General Stanley gave the order to charge, and he himself led two companies (K and H) of the 4<sup>th</sup> Michigan Cavalry and about 50 men of the 15<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania against the line in front of our left, routed the enemy, and captured one stand of colors, which was brought in by a sergeant of the 15<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania. Captain Jennings, 7<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania , with his battalion, supported this movement.

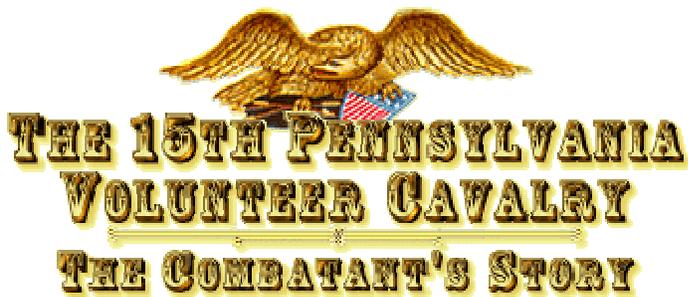
I am, respectfully, your obedient servant,

ROBERT H. G. MINTY,

Colonel, Commanding First Cavalry Division

Lieutenant CHAMBERLIN,

Acting Assistant Adjutant-General, First Cavalry Division



## INCIDENT OF STONE RIVER BATTLE

### Wm. L. Bratton, Company A



The Sergeant of old Company H had reported at roll call all accounted for but two on the morning that we left Nashville to join the forces that were now moving, with General Rosecrans as their Commander, toward Murfreesboro. The air was chilly, and after marching by fours a short distance we swung into a dirt road, and a few of the boys, including Billy Brown, Billy Moore and the writer, getting in a lively mood that was symbolical of our youth, struck up the song, at that time so dear to a Philadelphia boy, We re All Bound for New York. As we had come from the same school and had practiced it together many times it sounded quite well. The dough boys that we passed on the road cheered us. At the same time Major Ward rode down toward us from the head of the column looking like a youthful General, sitting his horse so proudly. He being a singer himself, joined in the choruses for at least an hour, singing with us various songs that we used to sing round camp fires.

The next day we had another tale to tell, and Company H did its full share. An incident happened which serves to show the spirit of one of our boys. We had skirmished with some cavalymen who carried the Lone Star flag. We raced them up and down the different hills. Major Ward stayed at the head of the column of Company H. In charging around the top of one of the hills a ball struck the carbine which Billy Brown carried. It twirled over out of Brown's hands and struck the Major's horse. When we formed the line on the top of the hill, the Major said: Brown, you lost your carbine, didn't you? Brown said: "Yes, I couldn't help it." The Major replied: "I saw you couldn't; but it's all right; come and be my orderly." Brown replied: "Never mind, Major, we will soon be within pistol shot." Brown died shortly after in the field hospital at Murfreesboro, having contracted a bad fever.