



S. Marks

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EXPERIENCES AT THE BATTLE OF STONE RIVER.

BY SURGEON SOLON MARKS, U. S. V.

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I SHALL make no attempt to describe the battle of Stone River, as a whole, but shall confine myself to a brief description of the little that came under my own observation while on the march to the field of Stone River, and during the battle of the 31st of December, which resulted in disaster to the Union troops.

During a heavy rainstorm on the morning of the 26th of December, 1862, the army of the Cumberland, under the command of Major General W. S. Rosecrans, left its camp, a few miles south of Nashville, and marched in the direction of Murfreesboro'. At that time the army was divided into three parts, or corps, known as the center, the right and left wings. The center was commanded by Gen. George H. Thomas, the right wing by Gen. A. McDowell McCook, the left wing by Gen. T. J. Crittenden. The right wing was composed of three divisions, Davis', Johnson's and Sheridan's, the commanders ranking in the order mentioned. Johnson's Division constituted the extreme right of the army, and I had the honor of being its chief surgeon, or medical director. The center moved by the Franklin and Wilson pikes, the left wing by the Murfreesboro' pike, while the right wing moved over what was known as the Nolensville pike, roads situated some miles apart, running in a southerly direction. Davis had the advance of the right wing, and was followed by Sheridan, Johnson being in the rear.

The troops advanced with great caution, and, if my

memory serves me, it was past midday when we first heard artillery and musketry firing. Davis' troops skirmished with the enemy, slowly pushing him back to Nolensville, where, near night, he was found in considerable force, occupying a high range of hills, defending what was known as Knob's Gap, through which the Nolensville and Triune pikes passed. Davis formed in line of battle, and as soon as the rear division could be brought up within supporting distance, advanced, carried the heights, capturing one piece of artillery. The casualties in this engagement were few on the Union side, due, no doubt, to the elevated position of the Confederates, causing them to fire over Davis' advancing lines. The right wing bivouacked at and near Nolensville for the night.

On the following day, the 27th, Johnson's Division had the advance, followed by Sheridan, Davis being in the rear. The Confederates appeared a little more stubborn than the day before, but did not offer sufficient resistance to prevent Johnson's troops, unaided, from pushing them slowly back to Triune, where, near night, they were again found in line of battle in somewhat greater force than the day before. Johnson formed line of battle and advanced, supported by the other divisions, and, after quite a severe engagement, the Confederates gave way and retreated, Johnson following them a mile and a half or two miles before going into camp. In this engagement the casualties were numerous on both sides.

I remember two young men found near together, about the same age and size, who might easily have been mistaken for brothers, both fatally wounded—one was dressed in blue, one in gray. As their sufferings were intense and it was cold and rainy, they were taken into a farm house near by, occupied by a woman and two grown daughters. The husband and father was in the Confeder-

ate army. When the wounded men were taken into the house, the three women at once devoted themselves to the care of the Confederate, not even deigning to look at the Union soldier. Notwithstanding more than thirty years have passed since I witnessed that scene, it is as fresh in my memory as if the event had occurred yesterday. I see those women seated around that wounded soldier, one with pen, ink and paper, writing, while the dying Confederate feebly dictates a farewell letter to his mother; one supports his head, the third one wipes the death dew from his brow. On the other side of the room is the Union soldier, surrounded by comrades with whom but an hour or two before he had unhesitatingly charged those rebel lines. One comrade writes, while he dictates his last letter to the loved ones at home. No woman's hand could nurse him more tenderly than do those brave men; with eyes dimmed with tears they seem to anticipate his every want. Remaining with them until their most intense sufferings were relieved, and well knowing that they had "fought their last battle," and ere the rising sun would "sleep their last sleep," I retired to my quarters. Returning early in the morning I found them at rest. They had joined the great army of the dead. The Union soldier was buried near where he fell, while the body of the Confederate, by request, was committed to the care of those who had nursed him so tenderly in his last hours.

On the morning of the 28th it was found that the enemy had disappeared from our front. During the day reconnoissances were made in different directions and it was learned that the Confederates were massing near Murfreesboro', Davis' Division having advanced in that direction as far as Stewart's Creek.

On the morning of the 29th Sheridan moved by what

is known as Bole Jack road, to the support of Davis, and was followed by two brigades of Johnson's Division; one of his brigades, Baldwin's, remaining at Triune until evening, with a company of cavalry and a section of artillery as a corps of observation. During the latter part of the day there was heavy skirmishing in Davis' front, with numerous casualties. McCook's command camped for the night within five or six miles of Murfreesboro'.

On the morning of the 30th Sheridan had the advance, followed by Davis, and moved east in the direction of Murfreesboro', over the Wilkinson pike, Johnson's Division being held in reserve. Sheridan soon met the enemy's skirmishers, who seemed unusually stubborn, and, as he advanced, it required two or three regiments to push them back sufficiently to enable him to join the right of Thomas, who had advanced in the direction of Murfreesboro' over the Nashville pike. When Sheridan reached Thomas' right, he formed line of battle a little to the south and obliquely to the Wilkinson pike, his lines extending nearly east and west. In his front was an open field, beyond which there was a heavy belt of timber, occupied by the enemy's artillery and sharpshooters, who kept up an incessant and annoying fire. In the rear, between Sheridan's position and the Nashville pike, was a heavy cedar thicket, through which Thomas extended his right, joining Sheridan's left at an obtuse angle. Guns from Bush's and Hascock's batteries succeeded, after a sharp artillery duel, in silencing the rebel battery in their front.

As near as I can remember, between half past two and three o'clock in the afternoon of the 30th, Davis' Division formed on the right of Sheridan, and Johnson on the right of Davis. The three divisions then advanced over the open field in their front, swinging in the arc of a

circle toward the east, Sheridan's left being the pivotal point, thus establishing a continuous line with the center and the right and left wings.

As nearly all the troops of the command, excepting the reserve, were in line of battle, and as there were a large number of wounded in ambulances, a division hospital was established at Colonel Smith's plantation, where there was excellent water, with plenty of hay and straw, also a large frame house which was surrounded by numerous log houses, occupied as negro quarters, that could be used for hospital purposes. Having assigned to duty all the medical officers of the division, either at the hospital or on the field, I rode to the front as darkness was approaching, for the purpose of selecting a route by which ambulances could reach our troops. I found that the lines had advanced much further than I had expected, leading me to fear that the hospital was too far in the rear, Johnson's right having passed entirely through the timber occupied by the enemy the fore part of the day, and extending across the Franklin dirt road into an open field, without the slightest protection; while within gun shot of his front and right flank was a heavy cedar thicket beyond which nothing could be seen. I reported to General Johnson the location of the hospital, at the same time expressing regret that I could not establish it nearer our lines owing to the absence of water. However, the General expressed himself as entirely satisfied with its position, and at once relieved my anxiety in the matter by repeating orders he had received for his guidance the following day, which were substantially as follows: "If our right was attacked, it was to fall back slowly, contesting every inch of ground. Our left was to cross Stone river and move into Murfreesboro'. If the enemy failed to

attack, we were to do so at a signal to be given by Gen. Rosecrans."

Gen. Johnson established his headquarters in the edge of the timber, a short distance in the rear of his troops, where we spent an anxious and uncomfortable night. All night long the rumbling of moving artillery could be heard in our front. Gen. Sheridan, in his memoirs, tells us that "Gen. Sill, commanding a brigade in his division, came back to his headquarters about two o'clock on the morning of the 31st, and reported that on his front a continuous movement of infantry and artillery had been going on all night within the Confederate lines; that he was confident that Bragg was moving on our right with the purpose of making an attack in that direction early in the morning." He further states that he and Gen. Sill "went back to Gen. McCook's headquarters near the Grescomb House, and communicated to him the intelligence and their consequent impression." In a conversation with Gen. McCook but a few months since, he tells me that Gen. Rosecrans was kept fully informed of what was going on within the Confederate lines, yet no change was made in the position of our troops during the night.

On the morning of the 31st, every one connected with our headquarters was up and had breakfast long before daylight; horses were saddled and transportation sent to the rear. A little after six o'clock Gen. Willoch, who commanded a brigade in Johnson's Division, rode up to headquarters and entered into conversation with Gen. Johnson. Shortly after firing was heard on our right. Gen. Johnson places the time as twenty-two minutes past six o'clock. Gen. Willoch mounted, started for his command and in his great haste rode through our lines; his horse was killed and he was captured. Gen. Johnson

with most of his staff and orderlies rode to the front, while I mounted, and, accompanied by one orderly, rode to the hospital, and on reaching it found a large number of wounded had already arrived. I went into the building and was there but a moment when my orderly, an intelligent young man, came in and very quietly informed me that our troops were falling back. Supposing that they were slowly falling back in obedience to orders, and that the enemy's advance would be checked long before reaching our position, I told him that it was all right, and to be sure not to do or say anything to create excitement or alarm. He went out, but almost immediately returned and asked if I would go and see for myself, and noticing that he was somewhat excited I went out without attracting attention. As I stepped from among the buildings, where I could look to the front, I confess that I was not only surprised but paralyzed. Johnson's men were falling back as fast as their legs could carry them, in the greatest possible confusion, followed by the enemy in perfect lines of battle, outflanking them at least a quarter of a mile and outnumbering them more than four to one. It was evident that our position must shortly fall into the hands of the enemy. There was but a moment to consider what course to pursue. Any attempt to move our wounded would be worse than useless, and humanity demanded that they should not be abandoned by their medical officers. As there was a larger force of surgeons in the hospital than on the field, I felt that I could be of more service on the field and determined if possible to make my escape, hoping that those busily engaged in the building might be captured before they became aware of the true condition of things, but by the time I had determined what course to pursue, and had mounted my horse, the medical officers were by my side. Volunteers were

called for to remain with the wounded, but as there was no response, I dismounted and told them that I would stay and that they were at liberty to leave or remain. To their credit, be it said, every surgeon returned to his duty, and stood bravely at his post during the trying ordeal which followed. In a few moments our troops had fallen back past our position, and we were between the two armies. Fortunately for us, the artillery of both armies was on our left, while the log houses before mentioned offered excellent protection against small arms. During the few moments that we were between the lines, I saw but one man killed. Soon the Confederates passed by us in pursuit of our men, and as our troops retreated, they fell off towards our left across the open field, over which they had advanced the day before. From our elevated position we could see the troops of both armies. It was evident that many of our men were wounded and making every effort in their power to avoid capture. Some few had thrown away their guns and were running for dear life, while others would load their guns as they retreated, and would wheel and fire upon the advancing foe. As Johnson fell back, Davis' right was exposed, and notwithstanding his men fought with desperation, they were compelled to give way to numbers. Davis' falling back compelled Sheridan to change position. Johnson's men shortly disappeared through the cedar thicket, followed in a few moments by Davis'. Sheridan drew back his right and formed line of battle at nearly right angles to the one occupied at the opening of the engagement, and his men fought with such determination that the enemy was checked for a time in his victorious advance. After several sharp engagements Sheridan's men also fell back through the cedars and were followed by the enemy.

Our hospital was at once surrounded by skulkers, to be found in all armies, ever ready to fall out of line of battle and wander over the field, robbing the dead and wounded. They were greatly elated over their success, and embraced every opportunity to assure us that our entire army was being routed, and from what we had seen we feared that such might be the case. After both armies had disappeared through the cedars, there was a lull in the battle and we could see our wounded on the field. I approached the first general officer of the Confederate army who rode past our position, and asked if permission would be granted to go on the field with surgeons and care for the wounded. I was treated courteously, but was told that he could not give us protection and that we should remain where we were. After what seemed to be half or three-quarters of an hour of comparative quiet, we heard a rebel yell, followed by a terrific artillery and musketry fire. We were necessarily ignorant of the result of the charge, but were assured by our captors that their troops were victorious. After a time we heard another rebel yell, followed by heavy firing, which led us to conclude that our forces were not entirely driven from the field. All was again quiet, except a little sputtering of musketry here and there and an occasional artillery fire, when all at once the roar of battle rolled up from left to right, then receded, then advanced like some mighty ocean wave dashing itself into spray on a rock-bound coast, while the earth shook and trembled beneath the discharge of more than a hundred pieces of artillery. The battle raged all day long, sometimes on the right and center, at other times on the left, when the curtain of night fell upon the scene and put a stop to the conflict. We could distinctly hear the rumbling of artillery and army wagons on the Nashville pike, and were told that our

army was in full retreat. Companions, I trust that the few of us who survive may never again be called upon to endure another such a day and night of suffering and anxiety as those of us endured who were prisoners on that memorable field. In the morning we had seen that splendid body of men constituting the right wing of our army, who but a few days before had started out on an aggressive campaign, and who but the night before had so confidently stepped into line of battle, swept from the field, like chaff before the wind, by overwhelming numbers. We had seen hundreds of our comrades fall, yet we were powerless to aid them. All day long we had listened to the roar of battle beyond the cedars, and watched the feathery fringes of smoke, as it was wafted from the field above the tree tops, while everything seemed to indicate the defeat of our army. When darkness stopped the conflict and we heard the rumbling on the pike, we were not only told that our troops were retreating, but that the enemy had sent a strong force of infantry and cavalry around our right to intercept them, and that the capture or destruction of our army was only a question of time; and what we had seen during the fore part of the day led us to fear that what our captors told us might be true. Hour after hour, that cold December night, we shivered around our camp fires, listening to the rumbling on the pike, and trying to interpret its meaning.

At last the New Year was ushered in, and what a New Year, not only to our poor wounded soldiers on that sodden field, whose sufferings language could not describe, but to the thousands both north and south who mourned the loss of loved ones. Time went on, and again we listened to the rumbling on the pike, and as it did not seem to diminish in volume or grow more distant, we began to hope that our captors had reported falsely, and that our

army was not retreating, but merely changing position, bringing up ammunition and rations preparatory to renewing the struggle the coming day.

The day dawned, and with what breathless anxiety we listened, fearing, yet hoping that our forces might be there to renew the conflict. We had not long to wait before the opening of battle relieved our terrible anxiety. Then we knew that our army was on the other side of the cedars; that the brave McCook had rallied his forces, and we hoped was in position to meet the enemy under more favorable circumstances than the day before. We believed that the men of the center would be anchored to the very rocks upon which they stood, by the love and confidence they bore their great commander, Gen. George H. Thomas; that the left, under the command of Kentucky's loyal sons, would do all in the power of brave men to turn defeat into victory.

During the night the Confederate officers had gathered in the numerous skulkers, and we found ourselves almost alone in the rear of the rebel lines on the morning of the first of January, 1863. Colonel Smith, the owner of the plantation where we located, a rebel, but a kind and humane man, had saved one old and decrepit horse that he harnessed to a wagon on which was a hayrack, and went with us to aid in bringing in such of our wounded as had survived the exposure of that winter's night. We witnessed many scenes which would tend to moisten the eyes of the hardest-hearted. The field was covered with dead, whose faces had become familiar to us in camp and on the march, and who but the day before were in the prime and vigor of young manhood. We saw men living, whose broken and lacerated limbs were frozen to the ground upon which they lay. Many limbs were severed from bodies, not with the expectation of saving

life, but to relieve the sufferer from an offensive mass and render his last hours more comfortable. Very few of our men who lay on the field during the night survived for any length of time. Although the battle raged furiously from time to time, we were so thoroughly engaged with the care of our wounded that we hardly realized that an engagement was going on between two powerful armies within three quarters of a mile of us. Again darkness put a stop to the strife and the tired armies lay down to rest. There was, however, no rest for the medical officers. All night long, with lanterns and candles, they moved around among the wounded, listening to their groans and pleadings for relief.

With the morning came the renewal of battle. A few officers were again sent out to search every nook and corner on the field, over which our troops fought the first morning, that we might be sure that no living soldier was uncared for. During the day the surgeons were busy caring for the wounded as best they could under the circumstances.

It did not seem to us that the battle raged with as much fury as on the preceding days, until near night, when there was a terrific outburst of artillery firing on what seemed to be our left. We afterwards learned that it was due to our troops massing sixty-five or seventy pieces of artillery for the purpose of resisting an attack from Breckenridge's Corps, and which made sad havoc in the ranks of that command, forcing a retreat.

Near midnight of the third night, I lay down upon an improvised amputating table and was soon sound asleep. Near daylight an attendant woke me and said there was a great commotion among the rebels. As I looked out, the Confederate cavalry was leaving the field as fast as their horses could carry them. From observing the

behavior of the enemy's cavalry, we concluded that Bragg was retreating with his entire army. Taking a white handkerchief, I started for the Union lines, and not being halted by either friend or foe, I proceeded as far as the Nashville pike, where I soon met Gen. Rosecrans and staff, and procured rations and medical stores for the twelve hundred wounded in our field hospital. Gen. Rosecrans occupied Murfreesboro' with his army on the 4th of January, and the battle of Stone River was at an end.

It was reported as a Union victory; it was, however, dearly bought. Of the 42,000 officers and men taken into the battle by Gen. Rosecrans, 13,230 were killed, wounded or missing, or thirty-one and a half per cent of his entire force. Bragg had on the defensive 37,800 officers and men, and lost in killed, wounded or missing 10,306, or nearly twenty-eight per cent. of his force. These figures give some idea of the stubbornness with which the field of Stone River was contested. Many of our wounded, who could bear transportation, were sent to Nashville general hospital as rapidly as cars could be procured. General hospitals were also established in Murfreesboro', but owing to the great number of severely wounded, who could not be moved without endangering life, the field hospitals were not broken up for weeks.

The Army of the Cumberland was reinforced, partially reorganized, and remained at Murfreesboro' for nearly six months. During that time heavy earthworks were erected for the defense of the place. Foraging parties were sent out from time to time, frequently encountering the enemy, the skirmishing arising almost to the magnitude of a battle, with heavy losses on both sides. A large amount of stores were accumulated, and on the 26th of June the army started on what was known as the Tullahoma campaign.

Companions, the part taken by the Union troops in the battle of Stone River has gone into history that will be read by future generations, after the monument erected to commemorate their heroic deeds has disintegrated and crumbled to dust; and if the spirits of those who fell upon that field are permitted to take cognizance of earthly things; if they can see the flag they once loved so well and for which they laid down their lives, now flung to the breeze from ocean to ocean; if they realize that their blood helped to permanently cement this Union; if they appreciate the magnitude and strength of this Republic, and its influence among the nations of the earth, we may well believe that they rejoice and return thanks that they had a life to give in defense of our national existence.