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FIGHTING THEM OVER.

What Our Veterans Have to Say About Their Old Campaigns.

THE SABER BRIGADE.

Stirring Incidents in the History of that Gallant Command.

EDITOR NATIONAL TRIBUNE:

## STONE'S RIVER EXTRACT



Almost daily I am in receipt of letters from all parts of the Union urging me to write the history of my old brigade. This I cannot do, the dates necessary for the correct performance of the work not being in my possession; but if the soldiers' friend, The National Tribune, will grant me the requisite space, I will, from time to time, give incidents in its career, which when placed in chronological order, will be a history of the leading events in its very active life.

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In the advance from Nashville, on Dec. 26, the brigade, consisting of the 3d Ky. Cav., Col. Eli Murray (then only 19 years of age) commanding; the 4<sup>th</sup> Mich. Cav., Lieut.-Col W.H. Dickinson commanding; the 7<sup>th</sup> Pa., Maj. John Wynkoop commanding; one company 2d Ind. Cav., and Lieut. Newell's section of Battery D, 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Art. (two steel Rodmans) acted as advance guard to the left wing of the army, moving on the direct road to Murfreesboro.

We had steady and continuous skirmishing, and at times heavy fighting, with the enemy's cavalry under Gen. Wheeler until 3 p.m. on the 29<sup>th</sup>, when they were driven back on Bragg's line of battle in front of Murfreesboro.

On the 30<sup>th</sup>, a force of Confederate cavalry captured [and] destroyed the wagon train of the Third Brigade of Rousseau's Division, on the Jefferson pike in rear of our left, and was threatening our line of supplies on the Nashville road.

Leaving the company of the 2d Ind. on courier duty, and the 3d Ky. and two battalions of the 7<sup>th</sup> Pa forming a chain of videts in the rear of the [line of battle?] to prevent straggling, I marched for Lavergne at about 11 o'clock that night, close to Col. Walker's Brigade of Gen. Fry's Division.

On the morning of the 31<sup>st</sup> heavy cannonading was heard a little west of south, in the direction of the position occupied by Gen. McCook's Corps. The continuity of the cannonading indicated very heavy fighting. Knowing that we would be of more service there than where we then were, I started across the country guided by the roar of battle.

When crossing Stewart's Creek, Gen. Stanley, our Chief of Cavalry, one of the grand heroes of the war, with the 5<sup>th</sup> Tenn. and part of the 15<sup>th</sup> Pa., joined me. He

warmly approved of the course I was taking; he placed the 5<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> under my command, and instructed me to send my guns with an escort to the crossing of Stewart's Creek, on the Nashville and Murfreesboro pike, which position was then occupied by the 10<sup>th</sup> Ohio, commanded by Col. Burke. I detached Lieut.-Col. Dickinson, with six companies of the 4<sup>th</sup> Mich., on this duty.

As we advanced the noise of battle was moving continually eastward, clearly showing that the right of our army was being driven. Shortly after crossing Stewart's creek we struck Wheeler's cavalry, but did not allow it to delay us an instant.

When crossing Overalls Creek I found that we were in front of McCook's line of battle, and several shells were thrown at us before I could show them who we were.

This being simply a record of the part taken by my brigade in the battle of Stone River, I will only touch upon the grand work performed by other portions of the army as may be necessary to make clear what we were doing.

The Army of the Cumberland was at this time holding a position forming almost a complete semi-circle. The left rested on and east of Stone River. The line, extending westerly, crossed the river, the Nashville & Chattanooga Railroad, and the Nashville and Murfreesboro turnpike at right angles. From this point the right was gradually retired until the extreme right, resting in a cedar thicket, almost touched the Nashville pike. The extreme left was facing south; the extreme right was facing north.

I now took position parallel to the Nashville road, in front of and at right angles to the position occupied by McCook's right.

Six companies of the 4<sup>th</sup> Mich., dismounted, occupied a line of fence on the edge of a piece of wood on the west side of a large cotton field. The 7<sup>th</sup> Pa. (one battalion), mounted, somewhat retired, were in a position to the right of the 4<sup>th</sup> Mich., north of the line of fence; the 5<sup>th</sup> Tenn., dismounted, occupied a line of fence on the east side of the large cotton field, in rear of the 4<sup>th</sup> Mich.; the 15<sup>th</sup> Pa., mounted, was in rear of the 7<sup>th</sup> Pa., and slightly retired from the line of the 5<sup>th</sup> Tenn.

Capt. Mix, commanding the 4<sup>th</sup> Mich., and Capt. Jennings, commanding the 7<sup>th</sup> Pa., were instructed, if attacked in force, to fall back on the second line. At this time my entire force numbered 950 men.

My command was scarcely in the position described when the Confederate cavalry, dismounted, and not less than 2,500 strong, attacked the line occupied by the 4<sup>th</sup> Mich. The assault was handsomely repulsed, and the regiment then retired to the second line, which the enemy made repeated attempts to assault, but could not cross the cotton field in the face of the withering fire that met them; they were again and again driven back to the shelter of the woods.

A heavy mounted force now attacked and drove back the battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup> and the detachment of the 15<sup>th</sup> Pa., thus uncovering the flank of my dismounted line, which I ordered to fall back to their horses and mount.

The Confederate cavalry followed us onto the open ground, showing three strong lines of mounted men, any one of which outnumbered my command. Gen. Wheeler's and Gen. Bedford's Brigades formed two lines directly in my front, and Gen. Wharton's line at an angle of 45 degrees across my left front.

Gen. Stanley, returning from Gen. Rosecran's headquarters, at this moment came onto the field. After hearing what had been done, and our then exact situation, he said: "You look after those fellows in front and I will take care of this force," pointing to Wharton's line.

Stanley took two companies from the left of the 4<sup>th</sup> Mich., and was about to charge Wharton, when, suddenly halting, he said to the officer in command: "Wait here and I will bring you assistance," and galloping across the field to the 15<sup>th</sup> Pa., ordered that regiment to follow him.

I must here explain. The 15<sup>th</sup> Pa. was a new regiment; its Colonel and Lieutenant Colonel were not with that portion then on the field. Two days before, in an ill-judged dash, it had lost several officers killed, including two gallant young Majors – Ward and Rosengarten – and the men were somewhat bewildered.

There was hesitation in obeying Gen. Stanley's order, and I then witnessed one of the most heroic scenes of the war. Stanley, standing in his stirrups, his soldierly figure erect, his saber raised straight above his head, in a voice distinctly heard above the noise of battle, exclaimed, "The man who does not follow me is a ----- coward!" and wheeling his horse dashed back to the two companies of the 4<sup>th</sup> Mich. The 15<sup>th</sup> followed the 4<sup>th</sup>, and with a raging cheer this little band of heroes, led by the gallant Stanley, charged home into the center of Wharton's Brigade and drove it from the field, a Sergeant of the 15<sup>th</sup> Pa. bringing out a stand of colors.

I sent the battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Pa. to support Stanley, but he did the work without them. I charged the first line in front of me with the remaining four companies of the 4<sup>th</sup> Mich., supported by the 5<sup>th</sup> Tenn., but the Confederates, not wanting to receive us, broke and left the field on the gallop. Hastily correcting my formation I charged the second line (Buford's), but, following the example of Wheeler's men, they also declined the rencontre and retired at the gallop.

At this time the 4<sup>th</sup> Mich. Cav. was armed with Colt's revolving rifles, and did not carry sabers, for which, I have no doubt, the enemy in the dusk mistook the bright barrels of our rifles.

Van Horne, in the "History of the Army of the Cumberland," Vol. 1, page 245, after giving a short sketch of the operations of the cavalry under Cols. Kennett and Zahn,

says: "Finally there was a concentration of cavalry, under Gen. D.S. Stanley, near Overall's Creek, where successful resistance was offered a superior force."

I picketed well to the front and right, and held the field that night.

On Jan. 1, 1863, Col. Cook, with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tenn. Cav., reported to me; and on the 2d Col. Pitkins reported to me with the 4<sup>th</sup> Tenn. With two regiments on the picket line I held the ground on Jan. 1, 2 and 3.

Jan. 4 advanced to Wilkinson's turnpike, and drove the enemy's cavalry beyond the position occupied by McCook on the morning of Dec. 31.

Jan. 5 passed through Murfreesboro, and pushed Bragg's rear-guard, consisting of cavalry, infantry and artillery, six miles beyond, on the Manchester pike; and thus ended the battle of Stone River.

The casualties in the brigade were six officers and 133 men killed and wounded. We also lost 126 horses killed. We captured and turned over 192 prisoners.

Vale, in "Minty and the Cavalry," page 116, after describing our fighting in front of the right wing on Dec. 31, says: "In these engagements the rebels lost out of their cavalry 89 killed and 105 wounded.

R.H.G. Minty  
Brevet Major-General U.S. Vols., Ogden, Utah.