



Stones River National Battlefield

3501 Old Nashville Highway
Murfreesboro, TN 37129
Phone: (615) 893-9501, Fax: (615) 893-9508

Regimental File Donation Form

Donor Name: DAVID R MOFFETT

Address: 3626 W. MERCER WAY

City: MERCER Island State: WA Zipcode: 98040

Phone: 206 232 3626 Fax: 206 232 1721

email: drm@seanet.com

Significant Person's Name: John P. Webb

Unit: 28th Reg. (PA)

List Contents of Donation Below

Letter from drummer boy, John P
Webb, re Murfreesboro

~ 1955

Dear Rudy:

When I had the Moffet boys in my history classes at Meany Jr. Hi. they brought in a letter that their grandfather had written as a drummer boy during the Civil War. I made a copy of it and looked up the battle area and made copies of both which I use in my U. S. History classes each year. I thought that the Moffets might enjoy re-reading a copy of this letter and also the short description about the battle. You might enjoy reading this also.

Knowing that you are at the Summit quite often and that you will see them before I do could I impose on you to give this copy to them for their enjoyment? Thanks and I'll be seeing you.

Sincerely,



Don McIntosh

2217-22nd North
City 2

Letter written to:

Mr. John G. Webb
Freeport Armstrong
County Pennsylvania

Dear Parents:

I wrote a letter about a week ago informing you of the battle before this place called Stone River and of me getting through it safe and sound, but I did not know whether it would get through so I wrote again as I know you would be anxious to hear from me. I tell you it was the awfulest sight I ever saw from Tuesday morning Dec. 30 until Sunday mornign Jan. 7. On Tuesday Dec. 30 our regiment was sent out as skirmisher and we had one man killed and several wounded. Our artillery kept up a constant fire on the rebel rifle pits but they would not answer us and towards dinner time we heard heavy cannonading on our right and we knew that McCook had commenced. It was the continual sound of cannon all day but nothing to what it was the next day. Wednesday morning the sun broke out clear and nice and a great many looked on it for the last time. About 8 o'clock heavy cannonading was heard on our right still getting closer and closer when the news came that McCook was being driven back and our division was ordered to fall in line by our brave General Myley. We had not long to wait when the gray coats were seen to come up 6 lines deep but on they came, our boys stood up like veterans still on they came driving McCook's men like sheep but when they came up to our division (The gallant old 8th Division) they received such a fire that they staggered but they quickly rallied. Our regiment made a

charge when they opened on us with shell grape and cannister. One shell struck company F and killed 3 men instantly but they got reinforcements and we had to fall back after fighting for 2 hours and a cross fire when we fell back about 1 mile but we were reenforced and then it came our turn and we charged them through the cedars piling them up by the hundreds. There was not much more fighting until Friday when they made a break on our left and center but after fighting for about three hours our boys chased them over the river and into their fortifications and slaughtering them with grape and cannister without numbers. On Wednesday though was the longest fight of any of the five days.

Us drummers having no arms we did not have to go in the fight. Some were back in the rear but Jim Wenff and me were behind the regiment with a stretcher to assist the wounded. I saw men shot in every place you can think of. Jim was shot in the leg and had his arms tore off by cannon shots. I saw the three that were killed in Company F by the shell, one had his arms tore off and it went through his back and struck another in the breast hissing through him and killing another along side of him. Then Weaver was shot in the side and killed dead. Jim Husser was shot in the thigh and died of his wounds. We lost. Two killed and several wounded in our company. Altogether there was 150 killed, wounded, and missing in the regiment, our Colonel behaved nobly when he would hear us yell a shell was coming, he would order "down" and it would go whissing by and hit some unlucky fellow, the bullets came whissing by so fast I expected to get a touch every minute. One Rebel Regiment came up and fired a volley and I jumped behind a tree where a ball struck it on the opposite side. I saw a shell burst about 10 yards off me and scatter among

a regiment. This was the most horrible night I ever saw, and I never want to see another one like it. There must have been one hundred ambulances carrying the wounded away and they couldn't supply the want. Once where they ordered down a ball hit a limb about two feet off my head. Then I picked it up and laid down when a spent ball hit me on the back. I also picked it up. I went over the battle field on Monday and there was our fine fellows lying stiff and cold with their shoes, breeches, socks, caps, and overcoats pulled off them by the Rebels who occupied the battle ground after the first days fight. I went on further but I saw a better sight for instead of our men there by the _____ in the pile of ten and twenty all over the woods. One fellow had been wounded and crawled up to the fence and the fence got a fire and burnt his legs off. Our Regiment was the first Infantry regiment in town and General Rosenruis gave our Colonel permission to raise our flag, which was torn, over the court house where not many hours before the Rebel flag was waving. Murfreesboro is a vast hospital besides the large of wounded the Rebels took away, they left over 2,000 in turn for us to feed and take care of but there is not 2,000 now for they are dying every day, lots of them also our men. We have a nice brick house where most of our wounded in our regiments are kept. Colonel Miller acting as Brig. Gen. was wounded in the neck. Colonel Sirwell is acting as Brig. Gen. now. General Myley was on the field all the time and a braver General there is not in this country also Rosentuis and Sill the rest of our Generals, except Johnson, allowed himself to be surprised and his men cut up. I saw General Rosenruis, Roscour, Sheridan, McCook, Myley, Miller, Stanley, Crittenche killed a great many other officers. That day we lost but one general. Sill was his name, a brave man he was

assisted by Breckinridge, Purdee, Naines (who was killed) and several others. The Rebels fought with desperation they had given them rations of whiskey and gunpowder. I saw one of the keys in their camp. Our Rey Lt. Woolsteect was killed; Lt. Maige, Lt. Ankers and Capt. Jack were wounded. Lt. Weaver of company F was wounded in the breast. This was a hard fought battle and both sides lost a great many men but still we killed the most, wounded the most and took about as many prisoners and last but not least took the place that Jeff Davis in his speech and bragged in the field promised they would hold against the South and if they could do so much on the Potomac their secession would played out and if they didn't do it the western army under Rosenevues will do it for them. I would like to see McClellan take command again. He works slow but sure, but I must close pretty soon, if you will write me as long a letter as I have you. Let me know whether you got my money. I will have this war ended by the first of July and come home and tell you of my adventures in the cedars before Murfreesboro. Mother I wish you would get me two shirts and send them by mail as one of mine was burnt up by the Rebel in the wagon. The weather here is beautiful just like spring at home and we are quartered in a nice building, give my love to Erm and Ed, tell them to write me and I will close this letter by remaining-

Your affectionate son,

The Battle at Murfreesboro

Early in November, 1862, William S. Rosecrans, who had replaced Don Carlos Buell as commander of the Union Army of the Cumberland, advanced to Nashville. He was brave, well-liked by the men who fought under him, and a brilliant strategist; but "Old Rosy" was badly handicapped by a firecracker temper and an almost hypnotic selfcomplacency. He spent nearly two months preparing his offensive and on December 26 sent his army in three columns southeast toward the little town of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, where Braxton Bragg's Confederate Army of Tennessee had been encamped for a month.

Bragg, widely censured for his indecisive Kentucky campaign, had taken a defensive position above Murfreesboro, astride Stones River, a narrow stream that loops off northward to join the Cumberland River. To the east of Stones River, on the low hills which dominate the terrain, Bragg had posted a detached division under John C. Breckinridge, the former Vice-President of the United States. West of the river, where a heavy growth of scrub cedar badly obscured vision, he concentrated his main force.

On the evening of December 29 Rosecrans' army began arriving in the vicinity of Murfreesboro, and by nightfall two-thirds of his force was in position along the Nashville Turnpike, less than 700 yards in front of the Confederate line. By the next day Rosecrans' army numbered nearly 44,000, against Bragg's 38,000, and the two commanders worked out their respective battle plans. By some wierd coincidence they were identical: each general had decided to hold with his right and attack with his left. Bragg, who had previously reported his troops "all ready and confident" now telegraphed his superiors, "Enemy very cautious, and declining a general engagement. Both armies in line of battle within sight." The advantage would fall to the man who moved first.

At dawn on December 31 Confederate General William J. Hardee moved with clock-like precision against the Union right flank, catching some of the Federals cooking breakfast at their camp sites. The Union troops put up a stiff resistance against the relentless tide of the Confederate onslaught, but brigade by brigade the union right swung back like a door on a hinge; and by 10 a.m. the line stood at almost right angles to what it had been when the attack began. One hard-hit Northern brigade had suffered 500 casualties in the first few minutes.

Confederate cavalry, pursuing the fleeing Union troops, had intercepted Federal ammunition trains; and by 11 a.m. Union troops were forced to retire with empty cartridge belts. Some Ohio boys were told to "Fix bayonets and hold your ground!" and an unfortunate Illinois regiment, not equipped with bayonets, was ordered to club their muskets when the ammunition was exhausted. Phil Sheridan's men stood fast until the last minute and then executed an orderly retreat to a point behind their own lines.

The tireless Rosecrans was everywhere. To a subordinate's plea for reinforcements on his crumbling right, he thundered, "Tell(him) to contest every inch of ground." Inspecting the ford by which he still hoped to cross Stones River and assault the lightly held Confederate right, the general asked if the position could be held. "I will try, sir," replied the officer in charge. Rosecrans repeated the question. "I will die right here," came the answer. Not until he asked the same question for a third time and got the desired reply, "Yes, sir!" did Rosecrans ride off, satisfied. At 6 a.m. that morning he had sent a division under General Van Cleve across the river, and now, sensing that he was in serious trouble, Rosecrans recalled this force to the dwindling Union salient. By 4 p.m. he had completely re-formed his lines; further Confederate charges were repulsed; and the battle sputtered out.

The Battle at Murfreesboro (cont.)

Bragg was confident that his beleaguered opponent would pull the battered Union army back to Nashville the next day. Exulting in his victory, he telegraphed Richmond, "God has granted us a Happy New Year."

New Year's day, 1863, was cold and fair. The two watchful commanders seemed to be avoiding another major engagement; and Rosecrans' efforts to re-form were misinterpreted by Bragg as the prelude to a Union withdrawal. Van Cleve led his division of Federals across Stones River for a third time, taking up the position for the postponed attack on the Confederate right, while Rosecrans strengthened his forward line along the west bank and took measures to protect his supply trains and convoys from Rebel cavalry raids.

Bragg was surprised to discover on the morning of January 2 that the Union Army still confronted him. After a quiet forenoon he suddenly ordered Breckinridge's division to dislodge the Union left from the east bank of Stones River. Although Breckinridge protested the order, the attack was set for 4 p.m. With spirit the Southerners charged across 500 yards of open ground, completely exposed to Union artillery. Seeing frightened rabbits scurrying before the shelling, one Rebel called out, "Go it, cotton-tail; I'd run too if I hadn't a reputation." Within twenty minutes the heroic Confederate charge was repulsed, and Breckinridge's men fell back—minus some 1,600 of their comrades.

That evening Bragg was informed that reinforcements for Rosecrans' army had arrived. Disheartened, he wrote, "Common prudence and the safety of my army . . . left no doubt on my mind as to the necessity of my withdrawal from so unequal a contest." In the two separated days fighting he had lost nearly 12,000 men to the Union loss of 13,000. Bragg retired some 36 miles, for the winter; and Rosecrans, making no effort at pursuit, moved into Murfreesboro for a six months' encampment. Riding about camp the following day, he acknowledged the cheers of his men, "All right, boys, all right; Bragg's a good dog, but Hold Fast's a better."

TENNESSEE

