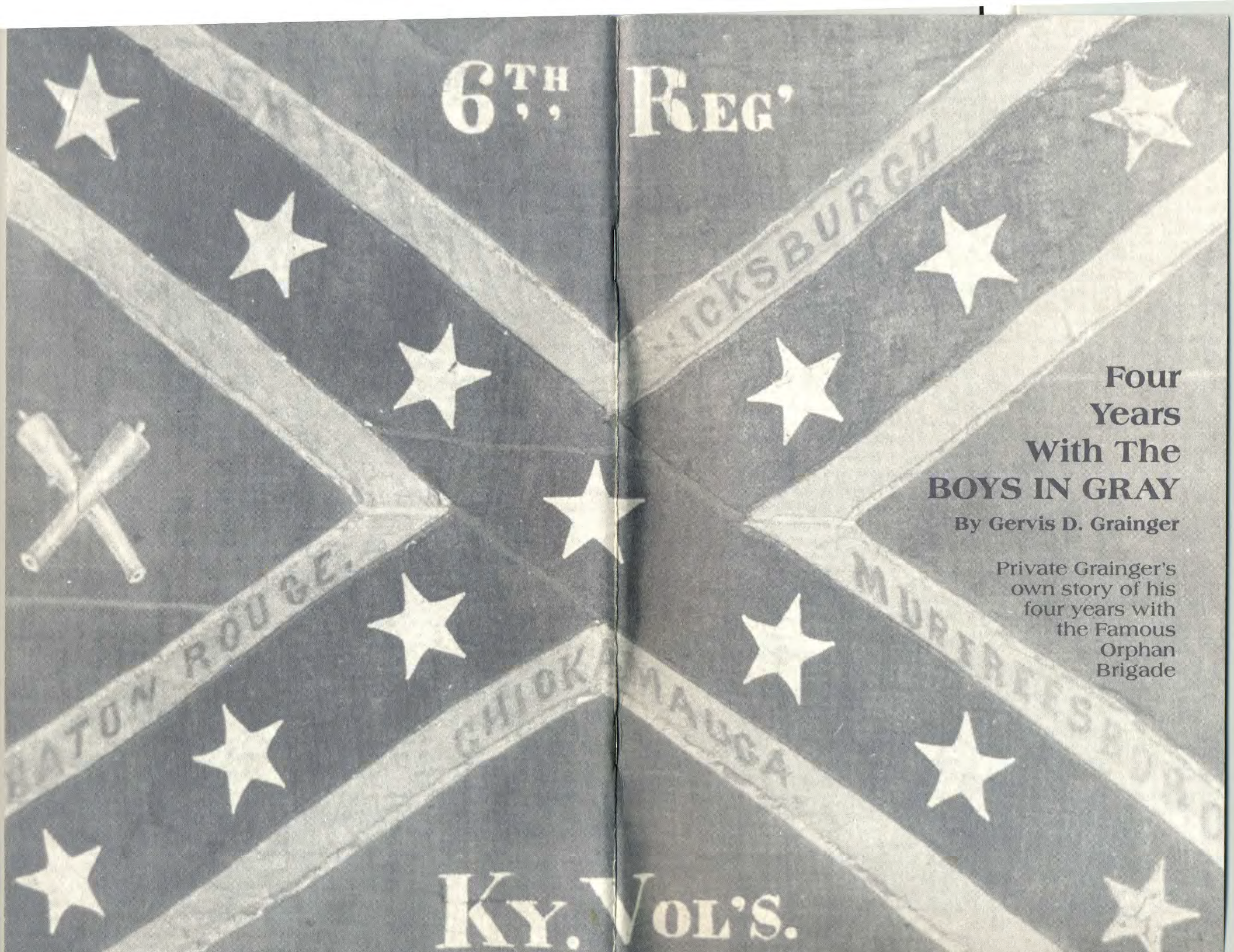

Four Years With The BOYS IN GRAY

By Gervis D. Grainger

Private Grainger's own story of his four years with the Famous Orphan Brigade

Four Years With the Boys in Gray.

By

Gervis D. Grainger,

Co. I, Sixth Kentucky Infantry,

Orphan Brigade.

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Introduction.

THE record of heroic deeds done by the men who were called upon to take part in what was perhaps the greatest conflict of all time, our Civil War, will never be complete. It is a record whose pages shine with sublime bravery which parallel any that have ever been set down to the credit of human valor, and one whose perusal causes every American heart to glow with pride, whatever its sympathies may have been with relation to the issues involved in that terrific struggle. Almost forty years have passed since Appomattox, and their healing touch has closed the wounds, jagged and bleeding, which lay open then in the hearts of the North and South. To-day we are a united people and our children ask curiously of those awful days as if they had been a century old. But many linger still who saw those awful days, "which tried men's souls," and many, too, remain who knew by personal participation the fearful meaning of those four long years of carnage and death. To both of these the memories of that time will ever be vivid and sacred, and to both any addition to the long chronicle of valiant deeds that has been written, will be received with a peculiar interest. The pages which follow are a recital of Private Gervis D. Grainger, now of Gallatin, Tenn., and few men in the ranks on either side could furnish a narration more richly abounding in thrilling situations and hair-breadth escapes than his. The reminiscences, published originally in serial form in his home paper, have been collected into this more permanent shape at the request of friends. Mr. Grainger's extensive acquaintance in Kentucky and Tennessee will doubtless secure for the little book a goodly company of readers, both on account of their personal esteem and for the intrinsic interest of his simple yet graphic recital; and for the latter reason, also, the book is commended to the attention of the general reader.

T. O. CHISHOLM,
Franklin, Ky.

August 12, 1902.

FOUR YEARS with *The* BOYS IN GRAY.

By Gervis D. Grainger.

The following reminiscences of the Orphan Brigade, and of certain personal experiences as a member of that brigade, have been prepared at the request of friends after a lapse of forty years. They are compiled wholly from memory and for this reason dates are not always positively given, but I believe that these, together with the details and order of movements, will be found approximately correct. Before entering upon the narration proper, I have thought well to offer some explanation by way of preliminary. One relates to the name of the brigade. This was applied because the men composing the same were of Kentucky, a State which did not secede along with her sister States in the South. Hence, we who went down to assist the seceding States in fighting their battles were not inappropriately called the "Orphan Brigade." Another relates to the frequent transfer of the body from the Army of Middle Tennessee to that of Mississippi and back again. This was expedient because of the fact that the brigade, having its home in neither section, would not be scattered as would be the case with a body of men mustered from seceding States. We were equally at home in any, and hence could be used as reserves and called to serve where the need was most imminent, which must account, also, for our having taken part in more engagements than fell to the share of the average soldier. With this explanation, I proceed to the narrative.

I was born September 6th, 1840, and reared near Franklin, Simpson county, Ky. I enlisted September 26th, 1861, in a com-

pany which was being recruited for the Southern army by Samuel Crewdson. This company was named "Buckner Grays" in honor of General S. B. Buckner. I was sworn into service thirty days later at our recruiting camp known as Camp Nicolls, eight miles north of Franklin. After drilling and recruiting at this point until about the middle of November, we went to Bowling Green, Ky., with approximately one hundred as fine looking young men as were ever mustered into service, ranging from eighteen to twenty-five years of age, with only two married men in the company. We were attached to the Sixth Kentucky Regiment and denominated Company I. We remained at Bowling Green until January and in this month were removed to Oakland and camped on the Edward Wilder farm. Shortly after arriving here the Federal forces advanced to Green River, burning the bridge which crossed that stream. The news reached us one night and by daybreak next morning we had taken up line of march in that direction. The rain was pouring in torrents, continuing until late in the evening, when it turned suddenly cold. We pitched our tents that night over the grass which was covered with sleet. The enemy disappearing, we were about-faced next morning and trudged over the same road back to Oakland. This was our first bit of war experience and our higher officials were much criticised by our men for such foolishness, causing unnecessary exposure. We were not accustomed to forced marches or army life, nor did we realize how much a man can carry, nor how little we could get on with. Doubtless many were carrying clothing and equipage to the amount of fifty pounds or more, with extra pairs of boots, shoes and even slippers. We also carried knives from eighteen to twenty inches long, with which we expected to hack the Yankees up on sight. Our line of march to Merry Oaks and return was fairly strewn with surplus baggage, cast off by the overburdened men. This exposure, coupled as it was with army rations (which we had just commenced drawing) caused much sickness in camp. Many were sent to Bowlling Green Hospital, and I was detailed as nurse. About fifteen days later I was taken with camp fever, from which the majority were suffering. I was sent to my father's home and in a short time the army was falling back from Bowling

Green to Nashville, Tenn., thence to Murfreesboro. I was sent by conveyance to the last named place, and from there by rail to Atlanta, Ga., Hospital. My command was ordered to Corinth, Miss., preparatory to the battle of Shiloh. All convalescents were ordered from Atlanta and I rejoined my command at Burnsville, Miss., the night before it started to Shiloh. I was not able to make the trip, and, with many others, was sent to Corinth. On the morning of April 6th we were aroused by the muttering thunder tones of distant battle. Every one stood aghast; scarcely a word was spoken for hours together. The roar of musketry, twelve miles away, swept from right to left, and left to right, with peal after peal of the cannon's boom, which added emphasis to the din of battle which was raging. These hours of anxiety and supense were interrupted later in the day by the arrival of a train of wagons and ambulances loaded with our first wounded, dead and dying. Among these were many wearing blue, my first glimpse of our common enemy. As is well known the death of Albert Sidney Johnson that day turned the tide of battle. The next day our troops commenced falling back on Corinth; but it seemed to me an army of dead and wounded had arrived in advance. I rejoined my command on their arrival, and scarcely missed a roll call for a year and a half. Our command was ordered back to Tupelo, Miss., remaining there about thirty days, thence to Abbeyville, on the Central R. R., thence via Jackson to Vicksburg. We camped on Big Black River, near the city, and were principally on detail to support a battery one and one-half miles above the city. This fort, I learn, was used in 1812, and commanded the Mississippi River five or six miles above the city. About the middle of June, 1862, near 6 o'clock a. m., and shortly after we had been relieved from duty, a terrific report from a large gun brought us to a standstill at the top of a bluff over which we were passing. Another and another report, following in rapid succession told us that something unusual was up. Then the battery one-half mile away which we had just left, took up the cannonading and a perfect fusilade of shots followed. We could then see clouds of white smoke rising from the river, which was covered with fog, and a dark object coming in our direction, closely followed by another. This was my first sight of a naval

battle. The first vessel proved to be the "Arkansas," a ram which had been built of railroad iron and cotton bales at Yazoo City on the Yazoo River, and which had successfully run the Yankee blockade and was being pursued by the Federal gunboat Essex. Between the land battery and the "Arkansas," the Essex was fatally disabled in steerage and floated with the tide past the city. Her whistle of distress brought one of the Yankee fleet from below to her aid. The slight damage of the "Arkansas" was soon repaired and rendered much assistance in guarding the river at that point. The United States Government decided to cut a channel across the bend some five miles above the city, as our fortifications at Vicksburg made it unsafe for them to navigate the main channel. They had a large fleet above and below the city from three to five miles away. They determined on an attempt to capture Vicksburg on July 4th. At midnight of July 3rd, all things being ready, at a signal, about fifty guns which had been placed at proper angles turned loose on the city. Some half-dozen were loaded with hot shot which coursed their way like meteors in the gloom of night, while shot and shell of various sizes poured their hail of fire into what seemed to be a doomed city. For one hour and a half the most magnificent fireworks that I have ever seen continued unceasingly. A few houses were ignited which seemed to renew the zeal of the enemy for a time, but, making no further progress, they subsided. Every man was brought in line, every gun was freshly primed, and we stood watching for an enemy that never came. Possibly a half-dozen men injured, with few killed, and three houses burned, concluded the first siege of Vicksburg. We remained at Vicksburg until the 10th of August. About this time we were ordered to cook two days' rations. We were in much need of salt, as it had become very scarce and our wits were brought to bear to obtain it. Excavations were made from the earthen floors of many meat houses and the earth dissolved in water, which was poured off and boiled down, from which we obtained a meager supply of salt.

Rations being ready, we boarded flat cars which were in waiting and proceeded to Jackson, Miss., thence via Central R. R. to Tangipahoa, La., where we took the road on foot for Baton Rouge. Having drawn no clothing since our enlistment, a period of almost twelve months, we were a ragged and tattered set, but were hardy and well. We camped in a pine forest that night, stopping about ten o'clock, as the weather was hot. "Halt! Stack arms! Rest at will!" finally came. Blankets were spread and we dropped on them by our guns, and would soon have been asleep. Near me a peculiar rattling noise was heard, which seemed to catch the ears of men fifty yards around. "Rattlesnake, rattlesnake!" was caught up by a dozen voices and five hundred men were on their feet in an instant, but the whereabouts of the reptile was not sought. We crossed the road and camped on the other side. Evidently we feared a rattlesnake more than the bluecoats, as one put five hundred men to flight. At four o'clock A. M. we were on the road and at five P. M. were on the banks of the Amite river, where we enjoyed the luxury of a plunge and a swim in the bright, beautiful water The Comite river was reached next night, twelve miles from Baton Rouge. Here we stopped a few days for rest. Then came an order to cook two days' rations, which was obtained principally from the surrounding country. An aged gander was obtained by our forager, Os Cushenberry. We knew not how, and asked no questions. He was promptly cooked (the gander, not Cushenberry,) with dumplings. The latter were eagerly devoured and the gander's meat saved for the march. One half pint of vinegar was issued to each man and was added to the water in our canteens, as no water was obtainable from this point to Baton Rouge. By ten o'clock we were on the road. Notwithstanding we knew that we were marching to battle, many of us were so overcome with fatigue that we slept as we walked, and at the command of "halt" we would awake only when we bumped against our file-leader. The ringing crack of a dozen rifles about four o'clock A. M., followed by another volley in a few seconds, and every man was awake and ready for the fray. The out-post had been encountered. We were swung in line through a sugar plantation about a mile and a half from Baton Rouge, and parallel with the Mississippi river. "Forward, march!" went down the line, and our division commenced closing in on Baton Rouge. We started on quickstep, many of us barefooted, over brier hedges and an eight-foot board fence. Then "Double quick!" came, the

Rebel yell went up, and a perfect blaze from the enemy's guns told us of their location. We had reached a large sweet potato field in the rear of the city cemetery, when a Louisiana Brigade gave way to our right. The command came "Lie down!" and we promptly obeyed, stretching ourselves like lizards between the rows. The aim of the enemy—one hundred and fifty yards distant—was low enough to cut the vines from the ridges, covering our backs with the fragments. The balls buzzed like bees. Our right was re-formed. "Attention!" went up the line, and every man was on his feet. "Forward men! Charge!" We crossed the cemetery, stopping at a paling fence that enclosed it. We remained here a short time, again on our faces, many of us firing from the baseboard of the fence. Others sat on the graves, and fired from the tombstones which protected them. On my right was Frank D. Nuckols. He was struck by an enemy's ball in the shoulder, near the neck, and died instantly. He was lifted away, Billy Anthony taking his place. In less than one minute he shared the same fate, and in precisely the same way. This caused us to look carefully for the perpetrator. The lifted flap of a tent forty steps away revealed his feet. He had been firing from behind a beech tree that stood by it. Five or six guns were brought to bear upon his position as he reloaded behind the tent. At the signal "three" our volley riddled the tent, and the slayer of our comrades fell his length beyond. Our right being in position, we charged through the woods, filled with the enemy's tents, driving everything before us. Many comrades will recall the brave Federal officer, who, dashing back and forth on a gray horse in front of his broken columns, fell in a vain attempt to rally them. On we went, coming to a halt only at the edge of the city, where again we lay on our guns. The enemy had fled over the river bank and had found refuge under its friendly protection. Three or four gunboats began a fusilade on us, but we kept close to the ground and held this position until dark. The "Arkansas," which was expected to have engaged their gunboats, failed to arrive. After tents, bag and baggage wagons and equipage, which we had captured, had been removed, we withdrew, taking up line of march 12 miles to Amite River, from which point we had started that morning. Straggling in from

two to four o'clock in a drenching rain, we were the most perfectly jaded set of men that, up to this time, I had ever seen. We here learned the boiler of the ram, "Arkansas," had exploded and the first war vessel of the Confederacy sunk. From this point we went to Port Hudson, where we remained a short time. By this time our rations were entirely exhausted, and we were compelled to depend solely on the surrounding country for provisions. A large field of corn, in full roasting ear, was bought by our commander. We were turned into this corn like so many cattle, and devoured it with like avidity, notwithstanding the total lack of salt, which had been an unknown quantity in our division for some time. This, with saltless beef, comprised our sole diet while here. It was a surprise to find, however, that the alkali of the ashes in which our beef was roasted supplied in a measure the lack of salt—wonderful law of compensation, comforting us even amid these dire hardships. We went from this place to Tangipahoa, distant about sixty miles, thence by rail to Jackson, Miss., where we went into quarters for rest and recreation, which was the first since we entered the service. Here we drew our first clothing from the Confederate government, and, as I remember, our first pay. About one-fourth of the Kentucky Brigade was barefooted on reaching this place, and half as many bareheaded. Our appearance is well depicted in Ed Porter Thompson's history of the Orphan Brigade (page 145).

I will drop the main thread of my narrative long enough to relate a somewhat amusing incident in connection with the battle of Baton Rouge. With others of my comrades, I was on picket duty. The main army had withdrawn and were returning to Amite river. The enemy had begun their advance, coming up from behind the bank under which they had taken shelter. We fell back as they advanced, were formed in a squad, constituting the army of the rear guard which had preceded us. Being relieved from duty, and extreme anxiety, we realized our utter exhaustion, having eaten nothing for twenty-four hours, and having marched twelve miles the previous night, fought the battle that day, and twelve miles before us to reach our camp. One of the boys (John Hope) had captured a demijohn of Cognac brandy, which was passed around. Not a man refused. But this

Rebel yell went up, and a perfect blaze from the enemy's guns told us of their location. We had reached a large sweet potato field in the rear of the city cemetery, when a Louisiana Brigade gave way to our right. The command came "Lie down!" and we promptly obeyed, stretching ourselves like lizards between the rows. The aim of the enemy—one hundred and fifty yards distant—was low enough to cut the vines from the ridges, covering our backs with the fragments. The balls buzzed like bees. Our right was re-formed. "Attention!" went up the line, and every man was on his feet. "Forward men! Charge!" We crossed the cemetery, stopping at a paling fence that enclosed it. We remained here a short time, again on our faces, many of us firing from the baseboard of the fence. Others sat on the graves, and fired from the tombstones which protected them. On my right was Frank D. Nuckols. He was struck by an enemy's ball in the shoulder, near the neck, and died instantly. He was lifted away, Billy Anthony taking his place. In less than one minute he shared the same fate, and in precisely the same way. This caused us to look carefully for the perpetrator. The lifted flap of a tent forty steps away revealed his feet. He had been firing from behind a beech tree that stood by it. Five or six guns were brought to bear upon his position as he reloaded behind the tent. At the signal "three" our volley riddled the tent, and the slayer of our comrades fell his length beyond. Our right being in position, we charged through the woods, filled with the enemy's tents, driving everything before us. Many comrades will recall the brave Federal officer, who, dashing back and forth on a gray horse in front of his broken columns, fell in a vain attempt to rally them. On we went, coming to a halt only at the edge of the city, where again we lay on our guns. The enemy had fled over the river bank and had found refuge under its friendly protection. Three or four gunboats began a fusilade on us, but we kept close to the ground and held this position until dark. The "Arkansas," which was expected to have engaged their gunboats, failed to arrive. After tents, bag and baggage wagons and equipage, which we had captured, had been removed, we withdrew, taking up line of march 12 miles to Amite River, from which point we had started that morning. Straggling in from

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only served to sharpen our already ravenous appetites. Os Cushenberry was called on for the cooked goose. He said he had lost it in battle. When questioned closely, he said it had been shot off with his haversack. This was sad intelligence, but we marveled at his narrow escape. We were forced to go hungry until we discovered a cow by the roadside some distance on. She was promptly hemmed in the corner of the fence and forced to "stand and deliver." A few pieces of corn bread having been obtained from a negro cabin near by, we had a feast fit for a king. By this time the rain was pouring, the darkness intense, and water was flooding the road, but through it all we dragged our weary feet until camp was reached about four o'clock A. M. I wrapped myself with a blanket that was soaking wet, and, with my head resting on a projecting root, I was soon asleep. When called next morning the water had risen around me until both legs and half my body were submerged. Cushenberry's wonderful escape was discussed, among other things, and he often interrogated as to the loss of the goose in battle. On being questioned about it some weeks later, he could conceal the truth no longer. Rising to his feet, with flushed face, he said: "Now, boys, blamed if I can stand it any longer. I'll tell you the truth. I threw that old gander away, haversack and all, for blamed if I could afford to be killed with a stolen goose swung around my neck." "Conscience makes cowards of us all." This brings me to say that while the boys were very fond of cards in camp, yet we often found the road by which we went to battle covered with packs which had been discarded. They didn't want to be killed with a deck of cards in their pockets.

About October 1st, 1862, we were ordered from Jackson, Miss., to Knoxville, Tenn., from which place we were expected to go into Kentucky to reinforce Gen. Bragg. This trip was made by rail, and I witnessed for the first time a scheme by which the boys secured additional rations. They threw out hooks baited with grains of corn, wherever fowls could be reached. It was amusing to see them draw in their game as the train moved off. Soon after leaving Knoxville we learned of Bragg's defeat at Perryville. We returned to Knoxville. This was very disheartening. As our time of enlistment, one year, had expired on the

day before we reached Knoxville, we, in a body, demanded discharge, or to be made "mounted infantry." This being denied us, we refused to answer roll call, or to do duty of any kind. Gen. John C. Breckinridge, learning of this, was soon in camp, and asked us to hear him. We formed three sides of a square. He took position midway on the open side. With hat in hand, he delivered a most touching and eloquent appeal—one that went home to the heart and fired the patriotism and zeal of all who heard him. He concluded by asking every one who was willing to follow him through weal or woe, and to die if necessary in the last ditch, to advance one step. Every man, without exception, stepped boldly forward, and three times three cheers were given to Gen. Breckinridge. We boarded the same cars that brought us there a few days before and went to Murfreesboro, Tenn. We went into camp in a beautiful grove, a half mile south of town, October 28th. There we lived like lords. Blockage runners were flying between this place and Kentucky every few days, bringing messages, letters, clothing and provisions from the dear ones at home. Many friends and parents visited the boys. Christmas day was a real Christmas. Numerous boxes were received, filled with the fat of the land from old Kentucky. But our enjoyment was to be of short duration, as the advance of the Federal army from Nashville would soon a tale unfold. Wheeler's and Wharton's cavalry were on the move, and on December 30, 1862, we were advanced to the front with all other troops and brought face to face with Rosecrans' army. On the following day hostilities began. While we were under fire from start to finish, acting as reserve and being support to Cobb's Battery, it was not until January 3rd that we had trouble enough of our own. About two o'clock of this day the First Kentucky Brigade, commanded by Gen. Hanson, was marched to the front and drawn up into line opposite the opening of a bend in Stone's river, which nearly formed a horseshoe. The Federal forces occupied the North side of this stream and we the South, except at this narrow opening, where their lines crossed over, occupying this space of about a quarter of a mile, which was well fortified. As a precautionary measure they had ambuscaded many pieces of artillery to protect the troops, if necessary, across the narrows. Every soldier seemed