

9th Texas Inf
THE

STEPHEN JENNINGS

TANNER

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**By
E. Russell Tanner**

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seemed to me dozens of these vermine were crawling all over me before we got back to camp.

On the 27th of Dec., 1862, we were ordered to the front, leaving everything in camp and marched to and fro. On the night of the 29th we slept in a corn field, cut stalks and lay on the wet ground between rows and slept, it raining. On the 30th we were stationed near a battery in the timber. There was heavy fighting in our front and the artillery got the range of our battery and silenced it, blowing up the caissons, and the horses came dashing down our lines. We were ordered to lay down. The sky clear and cold wind blowing, we lay until 9 o'clock at night, completely chilled through and through. Were moved out of range, had camp fire, got warm, ate our grub and slept. At sunrise we were formed in line of battle and advanced to the front where the pickets were engaged. The wounded on litters were being brought back to the rear. Cannon and minnie balls were whizzing by. Our Colonel, Wm. H. Young, a school mate at McKenzie Institute, mounted, standing up in his stirrups, made us a speech:

"Men, we left our homes to meet the enemy. He is in our front. Do your duty. The safest place you can find is at your post. Steady, men, steady. Don't dodge. Never leave your place in the ranks to get behind shelter-- Forward!"

One of our boys, John Chambless, bright and cultured, had flinched and played out at Shiloh and other places and felt disgraced and made Lt. Crook and myself promise to place him in the front rank and force him to keep in line. I was file closer. But John, the nearer we got to the fighting line, the harder he pressed back to the rear. Passing a very large sycamore tree, John took around the tree and I went the other way to meet him. But no use; back and forth we went, but I could not get near him and, of course, left him. I had no thought of using force, but thought I might use persuasion and induce him to stand up to duty. He got through the war and was an M. D. when I left Texas. I never told it. He had many fist fights and was spunky, but couldn't stand the bullets and bombs. And I now give him credit as being a sensible fellow.

We passed on and met the enemy in a woods pasture. The fire was heavy and many were wounded. We climbed the fence and went for the Union men. Back, back, hour by hour, we drove them, passed through two lines of Union soldiers, so we were under cross fire. Their last stand was made behind a fence. Our advance men coming up were very close to the last Union men to retreat-- 20 steps from this fence the broad back of Union Blue was retreating, my gun thrust through a crack, I on my knee and face to the breech and a good sight, with hand on trigger, when Archie Mayo, coming suddenly against my gun, threw it out of range, and before I could get another sight he was behind a bunch of trees, no under growth, and at last so far away that I am sure my shot was lost. I would certainly have killed this one but for the unexpected accident, but was glad then that I failed and have been glad ever since. True, it was a life and death struggle and our safety depended upon killing our fellow man, but for all that I did not want to know that as a fact I had deliberately shot a man to death. We passed the fence and were formed into line by our Colonel, but we were alone, had cut through the enemy's lines and were now in the rear of the enemy's lines on both of our flanks. But our success had the effect to cause the Union flag to be trailed and the men about faced, and the powder smoke so dense that we thought the retreating lines were our own men advancing. Some of our men opened fire on these Union lines, while others entered their protest--"Don't shoot, don't shoot, they are our own men". But by and by we caught sight of their flag and then realized what our 9th Texas Infantry had done. The Union lines passed behind a hospital, hospital flag flying, and we lost sight of them. We took position behind this hospital. The Union battery on the hill was pelting us, but of course could not shoot too near their own hospital. Our regiment had been reported captured, but General Frank Chratam pressed forward and found us, and while the bombs were bursting around, stood on his toes in the saddle and eulogized us for our daring, and, pointing toward

the Battery, said he would ask us to "capture that Battery". We were advanced to the top of a hill, with open field in the valley, where for one hour we watched the battle as it raged in the cedars just across this open space. We could see the Union and Confederate flags. The Union flag would give back, then wave and advance to regain the lost ground. The Confederate would wave and advance and hold its new position. We were ordered to support our men in this stubborn engagement. We crossed the valley and marched right up to our fighting line. I pressed through this line, thinking we were to take its place, and stood for some time between these lines while the battle raged. I was spellbound at what I saw. The smoke from the five hours fighting in this cedar break made a mid-night darkness at 2 o'clock p.m. The blaze from their guns made a wall of fire that revealed the faces of the men and was reflected by their glazed cap bills as far as I could see up and down the Union lines.

Looking up and down the Confederate line I could see these veteran soldiers, many of them on one knee. The fire from their guns plainly showing their grim faces and slouched hats, while taking deadly aim at the foe. I cannot tell why, but it seemed to me to be a field of glory. There was no thought of danger. No one came to my side and I looked back to find that I was alone. My regiment was out of sight. I caught up in an open field where it was halted. The enemy was in sight and firing incessantly. Again our men were moved on and I found myself facing the enemy alone, and saw our men forming behind a fence on the opposite side of this open level field, three or four hundred yards away. I crossed the field alone, in the midst of showers of bullets. My thought was, as I leaped forward, "My head was right that time, that leap", for it seemed impossible for one to escape unhurt while apparently the whole army at close quarters was firing at him. My clothes were pierced by bullets, but my person was not touched. Behind this fence we lost a number of our men and I lost my first and last drop of blood in the war. We had been fighting from sunrise almost constantly, until 2 o'clock p.m. I had emptied my 40 round cartridge box and picked up a fine Union gun and used it until it choked and I couldn't press the load down, and in my effort ran the gun rod into my hand, bringing the blood freely. Then pounded it against the fence to force the load home, but failed; it stopped about one third of the barrel from the breech. I poked the muzzle through the fence over my head, crouched down under the gun and pulled the trigger, thinking, "If you want to burst, burst". Rod and load went toward the retreating enemy. Some of the enemy had formed on our right in a deep depression and were cross firing on us. I wore a broad-brimmed Texas cowboys hat. Waving it over my head called out, "Come on, brave boys". We soon cleared the enemy up, but my ammunition was gone again and my gun rod, so I had to beg both every time I loaded. I picked up a cartridge box well filled and borrowed a ramrod and forgot to return it. Our regiment appeared to be alone, no sight of support. Our Colonel made a move to the right and we passed over a very high fence. The corner next to us was thrown out so the Colonel could ride through. I passed through this gate in advance of the Colonel.

These movements brought us in the rear of the enemy's position that fired on us so heavily as we crossed the open field and we could now see the advancing line of Union soldiers forming at right angles to his broken lines, ground timbered with but little undergrowth. We advanced firing. By and by I noticed that one of my company, Lewis Ross, passed me and I passed him and he passed me and I passed him. Looking back, not a man of our command could be seen. I spoke, "Lewis, they are all gone." He looked up and retreated on double quick time. I made the effort but my breath was gone, my liver gorged and very painful, and my truss out of place. I could not double quick. The bullets seemed to come in showers. I felt my exposed position and got mad—the only time I was mad during my service—and said aloud to myself, "Kill me, plague on you, if you want to!", and walked in the direction I thought our men had retreated and found them a half a mile back. But I was done up for the present, and when the men moved I had to remain with my heels on a log. When at last I was able to rise, they had been gone an hour or more. I carried my fine gun for a time, but felt it too heavy and leaned it up against a tree. I passed over an

open field that had been fought over and saw the dead in rows behind the fences; and such large, fine looking Union men. It seemed impossible that we scrawny Southerners could beat such men at a game of killing. One Union soldier attracted my special attention, lying on his back, dead, and a Testament, as I took it, closed and lying on his breast; the work, no doubt, of a ghoulish search for money. I stopped and looked at him, so healthy and strong in appearance, and a face that was truly handsome. The firing had ceased. I had no idea what direction our regiment went. Night was closing in and I found myself all of a sudden near Wheeler's Cavalry engaging the Union Cavalry. The fire rolled from their guns and the Union Cavalry was hurled down the road at break-neck speed. Realizing that I had passed outside of our infantry lines, I retraced my steps, passing Wheeler's headquarters, and found myself in an open space where heavy logs had been thrown together and were burning. It was now 9 o'clock as I supposed, a keen, frosty, starlight night, December 31st, 1862, and I lay down, feet to fire, hat over my face and did not wake until the sun was well up next morning, and again started for my command.

The dead were lying all around. Some were still alive, hair and whiskers white with frost. At about 10 a.m. I came up with our men, now occupying their place in our brigade that we had lost in the fight, our arms stacked near the destroyed battery that had fought us so desperately the previous day. The caissons had been blown up, artillery horses killed and wheels crushed, and on one acre of ground lay 105 dead Union soldiers. How many had been killed and wounded and removed to the hospital a few hundred yards back, of course, one could only guess at. We remained here two days, arms stacked, and had opportunity to walk over the adjacent battlefield. I counted 36 separate bullet entrances in the trunk of an oak 10 inches in diameter within 6 ft. of the ground. Some were higher, but at least 9/10 were low enough to reach the stature of a man. These bullet marks were on every side of the tree and the same was true of all the trees, for none escaped, and would, as I thought, average one dozen bullet marks within 6 ft. of the ground. The twigs along the neglected fence row where the Union supports of this battery fought were completely riddled as if beaten by an intense hail storm.

We stood at hastily constructed breast works three days. It rained incessantly in the evening and night of Jan. 5th, 1863, until midnight. The moon came out and our retreat began. We passed many bunches of the dead not yet buried, Union soldiers, as I understood, all stripped of clothing except the shirt. Their up-turned faces and white limbs shown in the moonlight, an unpleasant sight to see. We reached Stone River early in the morning, then rising and about hip deep. I took off my clothes, shoes, drawers and pants, waded across and dressed. I had secured a Yankee Cavalry overcoat, very large, sleeves covered most of my hands, cape came well down on my arms, and tail to top of my boots. This was my bed, coat and blanket. It kept me dry but got very heavy when wet. The boys wrung the tails for me and tied them up to keep the mud off. As we entered Murphreesboro a bright little girl of ten saw me, clapped her hands in perfect glee, "There's a Yankee; there's a Yankee. Just look at him. Ain't he a funny fellow?", to the great amusement of our boys.

Passing the town we crossed the river on a bridge, and near by I saw a fire and found a dry log, one end burning. I was exhausted and lay down on the log, flat on my back, and put my feet out to the fire end and fell asleep. When I woke the soles of my boots were crisped. Two days later I found my command in camp with tents. I had been out two weeks, from Dec. 27th to Jan. 9th, exposed to all kinds of weather and fatigue, with no protection but my Yankee overcoat. A day or so after reaching camp I had a pain in my liver that seemed more than a mortal could bear. The Doctor said gall stones were passing. And I had mustard plaster that blistered—but the burning seemed pleasant—and took huge doses of morphine, and carried the scar of the plaster for many years.

We wintered at Shelbyville, middle Tennessee, a beautiful country. My health for a time was deplorable. My camp diarrhea intensified, and blubbers stood in each ear every time I walked, which I was forced to do ten times