

THE
NEW ANNALS
OF THE CIVIL WAR



*Edited by Peter Cozzens
and Robert I. Girardi*

STACKPOLE
BOOKS

Rushing on our advance came on several hundred stragglers from the rout of the enemy's right in early morning, unarmed, though among them was a battery of artillery. They were huddled together in a confused mass on the banks of a deep stream, checked in their flight by the destruction of the bridge across it. Upon our approach an officer stepped forward and formally surrendered the entire party, handing me his sword and pistol. Soon the Confederates who had been in the charge gathered to the point, ranks broken, without order, elated and excited at the result. It seemed to me that they covered two acres of ground. I could see no one to give orders, and had an order been given, there was no one to obey. In this confusion I endeavored with the assistance of one or two men whom I recognized to start the prisoners and the artillery in the direction of our rear and had partially succeeded. I was particularly anxious to secure that battery to the cause of Dixie and felt that time was precious.

But the fates were against us, for just here, from the north side of the pike, came thundering down on us about a thousand Federal cavalry. Maj. Pat Christian, of the Rangers, assembled about thirty of the regiment and endeavored to check the advance until something in the way of order could be brought out of the mob, but it began to move off. No order could be heard, much less obeyed. On it went like stampeded cattle. Christian's little force availed nothing and all was lost, and before getting out of sight a few rounds from the battery added momentum to the disorderly retreat. The entire train was left to itself, without injury beyond the killing of a few drivers, mules etc. It is plain that this result could have been avoided by retaining two regiments in order; in fact, one regiment would have sufficed to capture all the train, for it was without a guard.

This was the end of the cavalry operations on General Bragg's left on this great day. Night coming on we were encamped till morning. During the day General Rosecrans right having been turned, it fell back on the railroad between Nashville and Murfreesboro, making an angle upon which the Confederates lashed all their fury, but failed to carry the position. Night put an end to the contest.

The Regulars at Stones River

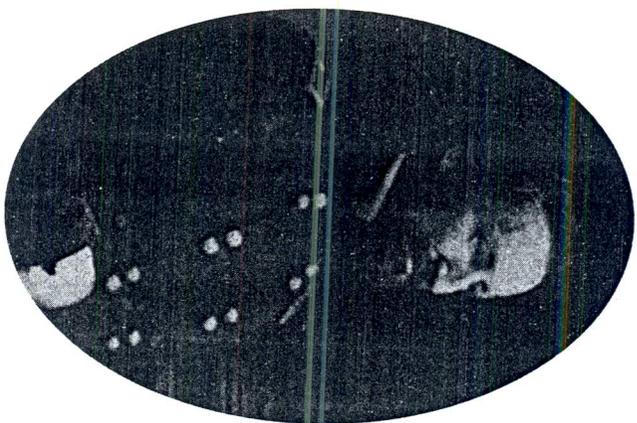
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In the narrative that follows I submit to the readers of the *Weekly Times* a description of scenes that came under my notice at the battle of Stones River, near Murfreesboro, Tennessee on December 31, 1862. I was then a member of Company H, of the 4th United States Artillery. The 4th was attached to [Col. William] Grose's brigade of [Brig. Gen. John] Palmer's division of [Maj. Gen. Thomas L.] Crittenden's corps, which formed at the time the Left Wing of the Army of the Cumberland. During the previous summer and fall that army had trod the soil of four states. It was composed of fine material with excellent discipline; its good qualities were always conspicuous, whether in bivouac, march, or battle. [Maj. Gen. William S.] Rosecrans, who had lately assumed command of it, had a fine record as a man of warm and generous nature, possessing indomitable courage, a witty strategist, and a tenacious fighter. We had some regiments with us which had served with him in West Virginia. These regiments never failed to cheer their old commander when he passed them.

The morning of December 26 saw the army strike tents, sling knapsacks, and file out on the different roads that converged towards the Confederates. Crittenden's corps marched out on the Murfreesboro Pike, Palmer's division in the advance. We had not been long on the march when the rain began to fall in torrents and the army received a severe drenching. When within half a mile of Lavergne, some twelve miles from Nashville, we saw the first evidence of a conflict with the enemy—a horse belonging to the



Maj. Gen. William S. Rosecrans

(PETER COZZENS COLLECTION)

Anderson cavalry lying on the roadside, its head being severed from its body. At this point Palmer's division filed to the left and went into bivouac for the night. About sunset I was the eyewitness of a gallant charge made by the Anderson [15th Pennsylvania] Cavalry and the 21st Ohio Infantry on the right of Lavergne. They drove the Confederates out of their rifle pits, Maj. [Adolph G.] Rosengarten, of the Anderson Cavalry, being killed in the charge. Twenty-one years have passed since then, but I have seldom seen such a happy body of soldiers as those who then stood in groups around their campfires. Merry songs, jovial laughter, and boisterous merriment pervaded the entire camp. The lighthearted Major [Frederick C.] Jones, of the 24th Ohio, was conspicuous by his ringing merry laugh as he interchanged repartee and witticisms with our officers. Little did he know that night that one week hence he would be writhing and groaning piteously, suffering from a mortal wound and calling upon his Maker to end his misery. Numbers of those who sang their gay songs around the fires that night are now mouldering in the National Cemetery at Stone River.

On the twenty-seventh [Brig. Gen. Thomas J.] Wood's division was in the advance. Our battery was with it. Several times during the day [Brig. Gen. Joseph] Wheeler's command would open with a battery upon the head of our column to impede advance, but our battery would soon brush it away. The last time his battery opened upon us our battery of eight guns

unlimbered in a field to the right of the pike. The captain gave the command, "Load by battery, load! Battery, ready, aim, fire!" And eight shells went straight for the Confederate battery. They fell in and around it, hissing and bursting, making the fence rails gyrate above and tumbling down among the cannoners. Not liking the compliment, the enemy's battery limbered up and galloped away to trouble us no more. At Stewart's Creek we went into bivouac. On the opposite side of the stream the Confederates had their pickets finely protected by a belt of timber, while our pickets were in an open field sheltered at intervals by stumps of trees.

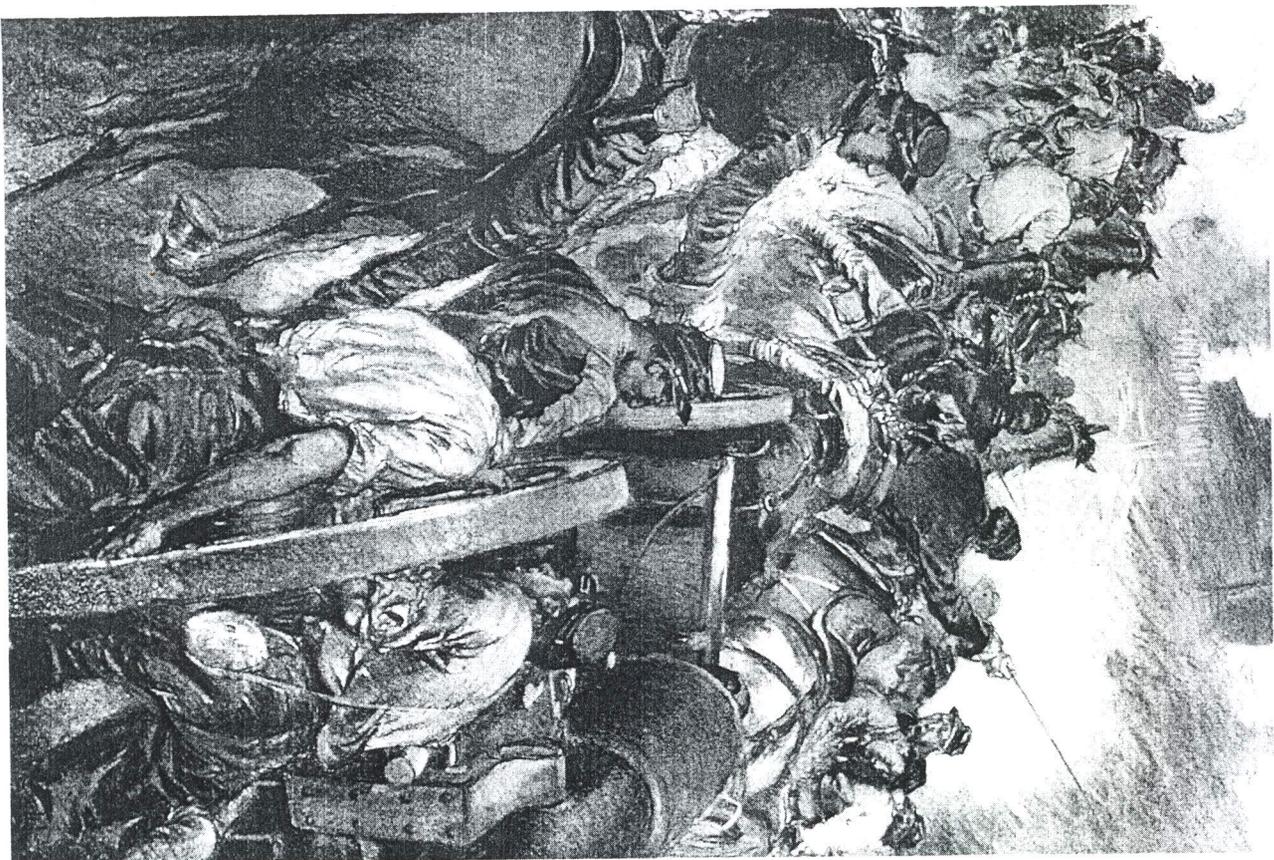
The twenty-eighth being Sunday no advance was made. During the morning a unique specimen of a picket made his appearance among the Confederates; he wore a stovepipe hat and a white duster, which reached to his heels. His appearance put our pickets in the best of humor, as they eyed him with curiosity. "Oh, what a hat!" yelled one of them. "Does your mother know you're out?" came from another. The Confederate pickets evidently enjoyed the bantering he received, judging from the laughter that could be heard along their line. But the man in the duster was not to be trifled with. He came there on business and he meant it, too. None of our pickets could expose themselves in the least. His tactics were as unique as his dress. No sooner did he fire than he would run to the next tree, so that the smoke from his gun would not expose his position. He never thought that his white duster disclosed his whereabouts. For over an hour he kept shooting at our pickets. Then he found out he had got himself in a scrape. About a dozen of our infantry who had been silently watching him slipped back to their regiment for their muskets and ammunition. When they returned they took position behind a worm fence, some forty yards in rear of our pickets, to catch the conspicuous picket on the fly.

In a few minutes that person fired. He ran to the next tree as usual, his duster flying horizontally behind him like the tail of a kite. Instantly a scattering volley from a dozen of muskets went for him. The Confederate pickets took in the situation at once, as was shown by the hearty laugh that came from their line. Half an hour elapsed before he essayed another shot, but being of a persevering nature and thinking he saw an opening, he fired again. Another volley went for him and the Confederate pickets cheered him as he ran to the next tree as usual. His duster could be seen gently swaying from behind the tree where he had last taken refuge, and behind the worm fence still lay those to whom he had become an object of interest. While waiting patiently for another opening they passed their jokes. An interested spectator myself, I waited to see the end of it, but the Southerner was not to be bluffed. Finally he ran to a log cabin on the edge of the

creek, some forty yards off. Our men blazed away at him. With a few long leaps of desperation he dashed into the building apparently unhurt. It was evident that he became disgusted at the warm civilities extended to him. He remained a recluse for the rest of the day. Our soldiers got tired waiting for him, and with laughter at the fun they had met with they returned to their companies.

The advance was continued on December 29 with little opposition until we came close to the Confederate lines, when heavy skirmishing took place. The 6th Ohio particularly received strong opposition when attempting to drive the Confederate skirmishers back. Taking refuge in a brick house the enemy defied the 6th for some time, firing out of the windows till the Ohioans charged and drove them out. Then they stationed themselves behind a slight breastwork, in proximity to the Confederate lines. Palmer deployed his division in line of battle to the left of the pike, with the exception of the regular battery, which took position in an old cornfield to the right. The 84th Illinois, the 6th and 24th Ohio served as its support. Four hundred yards to our front was a three-story brick house, called the Cowan House. At that time it was in flames. [Brig. Gen. James S.] Negley's Division, of [Maj. Gen. George H.] Thomas' Corps, had now arrived. It marched by our battery and deployed in line on the right of it. The situation of these four divisions was dangerous in the extreme. We were only seven hundred yards from the Confederates, and from the lay of the ground on our front they could have marched in line of battle to within four hundred yards of our position without being discovered. There was a looseness as well as a want of caution in Crittenden, which, as far as my personal observation went, amounted to extreme rashness. Soon after dark it began to rain, and the campfires blazed cheerily along the line.

Though we evidently were on the eve of a battle the usual nonchalance of soldiers was everywhere visible. Songs were sung around the fires with no thought of the morrow. Hearing the sounds of a fiddle coming from Negley's division, I strolled along the line until I came across the fiddler. He belonged to the 79th Pennsylvania. He had a crowd around him listening, which were in the best of humor. The fire was blazing in the center of the group. The fiddler sat on a cracker box, with an oilcloth over him to protect the fiddle from the rain. A rabbit, which had become bewildered, ran toward the fire, leaped over it and landed on the top of the fiddle, breaking one of the strings. It was seized by the fiddler, who held the little creature aloft by the ears while it kicked for liberty. There was no more music there that night, but stewed rabbit instead. The rain fell in torrents during the



Bring up the artillery (HEARST'S MAGAZINE)

night, and the morning of the thirtieth broke bleak and chilly. No visible preparations were being made for battle. The soldiers collected in groups around their campfires, cooking and smoking.

About 8:00 A.M. Crittenden, with anxious looks, rode along the lines and rectified his position. Wood's division held the extreme left of our line [Brig. Gen. Horatio P.] Van Cleve's division was in reserve. Only one division of Thomas' corps was in line (Negley's). The other three divisions had not arrived. [Maj. Gen. Alexander McD.] McCook's corps was expected to arrive during the day. Cox's Ohio Battery took position one hundred yards in front of our line and to the left of the pike and opened fire on the Confederates, a piece of foolhardiness which was inexcusable. The enemy soon responded with their batteries, shelling that part of our lines close on the pike. This might have brought on a general engagement, which would have been disastrous in the extreme to the Union forces. That morning I had the honor of being put in command of the left section of the battery. We had not replied so far to the shelling of the Confederates, although the cannoners were standing at the guns looking for the command to open every moment. A shell entered between the two guns I commanded, wounding me severely, mortally wounding a private by the name of John Mayberry, and killing a horse. Mayberry and I were placed in an ambulance and hurried to the rear, amid the hissing and bursting of shells. My companion, whose legs were shockingly mangled, groaned piteously.

The ambulance halted about half a mile from our lines, when we were transferred to the cold charity of a field hospital. My sole companion in misery when I entered was Corporal Riehl, of the 6th Ohio Infantry. He had received a flesh wound across the breast the night previous on the skirmish line. In a few minutes another cripple entered, a private of the 84th Illinois, and then another, also from the 24th Ohio. Stretched on the bare floor we patiently waited for the sound of battle, which we expected would soon open, but the day passed quietly away, darkness came and with painful wounds we quietly slept the night away. The morning of December 31 broke clear and chilly. About eight we could hear faint sounds of musketry far to the right, but we looked upon it as being only heavy skirmishing and paid little attention to it. About 10:00 A.M. I was startled by Riehl exclaiming, "By God, Sergeant, look here! I believe our whole army is retreating." Looking on the pike to which my attention had thus been called, I saw it crowded with wagons and artillery, galloping to the rear, with Confederate cavalry shooting at the drivers. My impression at the time was that our army was in full retreat. Corporal Riehl, who had his musket with him, seized it and, drawing it to his shoulder, said to me, "I have a good shot at

one of them," at the same time taking aim through the window. I ordered him to stop, explaining to him the consequence of firing from a hospital.

As far as the eye could reach on the pike there was one mass of wagons and artillery. The Confederates made the drivers turn the wagons around with the intention of driving them into their own lines. Not satisfied with what they had captured, they dismounted, tying their horses to the fences and began plundering the hospital. Blankets, overcoats, hospital rations, and the doctors' horses fell into their hands. "Now you will see some fun," exclaimed my friend Riehl, "here comes the 4th Regular Cavalry." Looking out I saw them forming in line about fifty rods away. The bugle of the Confederates gave the alarm. The sound of the bugle had scarcely died away before our troopers were in their saddles. In a quick, ringing voice Captain McIntyre, of the Regulars, gave the command, "Unslung carbines! Draw sabers! Forward! Trot! March! Gallop! Charge!" Two of the enemy, afraid and bewildered, ran in among the wounded for safety. There was a few minutes of fighting, but the enemy, unable to stand the dash of the Regulars, broke and fled through a cedar brake with the cavalrymen in hot pursuit till the sound of the carbines died in the distance. In about an hour they returned with prisoners and horses which they had captured.

Hints from one of the Regular cavalry gave us the first intimation that our right wing had been driven back; but we did not know the extent of the disaster; we did not know then that McCook's corps was a disorganized mass of fugitives and that the divisions of Thomas' corps, vainly striving to hold their own against the exultant Confederates, were also being driven back in confusion. The battle surged to our left until it struck Crittenden. Palmer's division received the first shock, which smashed Grose's brigade in pieces. In the midst of the confusion the Regular battery attached to the brigade was charged upon by the Texas cavalry and only saved from capture by the heroic courage of the 4th Cavalry, who had a hand-to-hand contest with the Texans. The Texans captured a cannoner belonging to the battery and took him away with them. The prisoner was [taken] before [Maj. Gen. John P.] McCown, of the Confederates. When McCown found that he belonged to Company H, of the 4th Regulars, he exultantly exclaimed to the officers around him, "By God, I told you it was my old battery that was on the pike; no other battery in the service could have done such execution." McCown formerly was captain of Company H, but resigned to enter the Confederate service. He sent the cannoner back to his company.

If we in the hospital did not know how disastrous the day had been to our arms we had practical evidence of it when a battery of the 5th Regulars in command of Capt. [Francis L.] Guenther unlimbered his guns alongside

for him to lie down. The two wounded Confederates were terribly chagrined at the defeat of [Gen. Braxton] Bragg. Previously cheerful, they became morose, sullen, and spiritless. The lieutenant was very restless. I asked him if his leg hurt him. "The pain from the leg is nothing," he said. "it is the damned bullet in my side that worries me." He had never mentioned having a bullet in his side before.

I passed a miserable night. Sleep was impossible. I was kept awake by the groans and sharp cries of pain which came from all parts of the room. The morning of the third broke bleak and gloomy, as if it were in sympathy with the horrible sights to be seen on all sides. Rows of dead that had passed away during the night lay at intervals outside of the hospital, having been exposed to the pelting rain which fell steadily during the night. The surgeons had been busy all night amputating legs and arms. I had never seen the horrors of war so vividly before. I fairly shuddered at the sight. The road to Nashville was now clear and during the day long trains of wagons halted in front of the hospital to receive the wounded to take them to the Nashville hospitals. I went in the first. On arriving I was placed in the Broadway Hospital, in which I received the best of treatment and in a few weeks was able to fight for Uncle Sam again.

A few words on the battle of December 31 and I am done. Historians of the battle state that McCook's corps was surprised. I will say that I have conversed with intelligent officers and soldiers of McCook's corps and not one of them spoke of a surprise. They said that they saw the Confederate lines advancing towards them, that the corps was in line of battle waiting for them, but that McCook and some of the division generals were not present when the battle opened. The line when broken became disorganized and could not be rallied. As a general, McCook was loose and careless. He took too many chances. He lacked that military acumen necessary in a successful general.

PART THREE



The War in 1863