

In October 1862, the Confederate Army of Tennessee, under the command of General Braxton Bragg, moved south from Kentucky to establish winter encampment in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. His plan was to replenish the Army's supplies for a spring campaign to win control of Middle Tennessee's rich farms and railroads.

Murfreesboro was a vital strategic position in the West. Control of Murfreesboro meant control of the main road and rail routes to Chattanooga, which was the major rail transportation hub of the Confederacy.

Major General William Rosecrans, recently given command of the Union Army of the Cumberland, shadowed Bragg as far as Nashville, 30 miles away. Rosecrans was very aware of the strategic importance of Murfreesboro. In order for the Union to defeat the Confederacy, the transportation routes running southeast from Murfreesboro to Chattanooga to Atlanta all the way to Savannah on the Georgia coast had to be captured.

Bragg and his Army of Tennessee, 38,000 strong, stood in the way of Rosecrans and this daunting objective. Rosecrans and the Army of the Cumberland, 45,000 strong, on December 26, 1862, began the 30 mile march towards Murfreesboro to meet his foe.

About 4 miles NW of Murfreesboro, with the banks of Stones River at its rear, the Army of Tennessee laid in wait for the Union Army. Early on December 30, advanced scouts of the Union Army located Bragg's position. The Army of the Cumberland moved its entire force within sight of the Confederate position and camped for the evening. Both armies prepared for battle the next day. Little did they know that the next day, December 31, 1862, would be one of the bloodiest days in the Civil War, exceeded in casualties only by the final days at Antietam and Gettysburg. By the time the two armies retired from the field on the evening of January 2, 1863, 10,266 Confederate and 13,249 Union soldiers would have been killed or wounded in the fields, forests and ground surrounding Stones River.

The Army of the Cumberland was split into 3 battle groups – Right, Center & Left. The Left Wing was commanded by Major General Thomas Crittenden. Crittenden's command was further split into 3 divisions. The 2nd division, led by Brig. General John Palmer, contained 3 brigades, with 1st Brigade commanded by Brig. General Charles Cruft. Under his leadership were the Regiments - 90th Ohio, 31st Indiana, 2nd Kentucky and . . . the 1st Kentucky.

I would like to introduce you to my Great Grandfather - 23-year old Orderly Sergeant William H. Busbey, attached to Company C of the 1st Kentucky Regiment (Volunteers).

As Orderly Sergeant, Busbey was responsible for all Company records (clothing and rations issued, roll call, transfers, deserters, wounded and killed). But Sergeant Busbey was more than a keeper of Company records. He was a prolific and gifted writer. He chronicled his entire service in the Union Army – from mid-1861 until he mustered out after the Battle of Chickamauga in June 1864. After the war, he became

a journalist, rising to Editor of the Chicago InterOcean newspaper, a position he held at his death in 1906.

Sergeant Busbey's diaries and letters provide a glimpse of true writer's craft and the spectacle of infantry warfare, from the perspective of a Union foot soldier. I would like to share with you excerpts taken from his diary, excerpts describing the costly battle of Stones River.

*Ted L. Young
Suwanee, GA
December 19, 2010*

Entries from the December 13, 1862 – January 8, 1863 Diary of Sgt. William H. Busbey, Company C, 1st Kentucky Volunteers – Army of the Cumberland

The Battle of Stones River - Murfreesboro, Tennessee (December 31, 1862 – January 2, 1863)

- Updated by Ted L. Young (December 19, 2010)

Tuesday, December 30

Morning damp and cool. Arranged early in line of battle. The 1st (KY) and 90th (OH) being a reserve for the 31st (IN) and 2nd (KY). Artillery firing all day and some heavy skirmishing but we do not materially change position. The rebels seemed to be reserving their fire and merely feeling our lines. All night could make but small fires as the rebels were throwing shell among us. Have to get up many times to warm but still rest well. Night tolerably pleasant and quiet along the lines.

Wednesday, December 31

Pleasant but tolerably cool and one long to be remembered by our whole army. In the morning an order from General Rosecrans read before the regiments complimenting them for yesterday's work and advising them as today's battle. The battle commences early on, the right extending gradually toward us. The right seeming to give way until the firing sounded in our rear. Then came the attack on our front. The rebel artillery throwing shot and grape and their infantry advancing vigorously. They were met and repulsed by the 2nd (KY) and 31st (IN). They held their position until (our two regiments) out of ammunition and then our regiment and the 90th (OH) advanced to relieve them. Our regiment advanced rapidly and when arriving at the fence charged double quick through the field up to the rebel line. Their advance retreating and their battery in part whirling away. The enemy soon appeared in strong force. Their flags and lines visible on all sides. They advanced slowly and firmly in front and passed rapidly to our left flank. Our regiment fell back quickly to the fence and poured in a heavy fire until almost completely outflanked. (We) Then retired in order to where the reserve should have been formed but here all was in confusion. One of Negley's brigades having broken in the center and followed by the enemy had run to our reserve mingling and almost destroying our lines. The 90th (OH) gave way on our left and left us open to cross fire from the enemy's flank. We did not hear the order to retreat until almost isolated from our brigade and then fell back double quick to the confused and mixed up line, which now was partly formed. But after firing one or two volleys the retreat became general. The enemy appearing on the right as well as the left. Some of Negley's artillery having been left among the trees an effort was made to rally and save but was only in part successful. As

the companies were so separated by stragglers that commands could not be heard or promptly obeyed. From here the line retired slowly and in tolerable order returning the fire of the enemy and superintending the obvious task of getting the gun carriages through the thick growth of cedars. Colonel Enyart (Busbey's commanding officer) fell to rear and kept a part of the regiment firing regularly but his utmost efforts could not stop the line and some of the caissons had to be left. One driver in artillery displayed the greatest coolness and bravely managing the six horses that the riders had deserted most **admirably (?)**. Captain Baker **stopped (?)** with the deserted caisson declaring that he would die before leaving it and there he was last seen. The rebel fire told on us severely. Charley Rice was severely wounded, perhaps killed in the cornfield. Crouse, Croak and Foreman badly wounded at the fence. Flanigan, Quigley, Black and Pfister, too, coming through the grove. Manyon and Guthrie received slight wounds and nearly every man had his clothes or haversack cut by bullets. The wounded were calm not one complaining. Quigley was carried to a wagon by Copley Hay having made his way out of the rebel line. The majority of the others being left on the field, some carried to a hospital that fell into the hands of the **rebel (?)**. Major Hadlocks, Captain Jones's and Colonel Spencer's horses were shot. Trent Faren wounded or taken prisoner. Bishop is missing. The regiment lost 9 killed, 48 wounded and about as many are missing. The enemy continued pursuit until we reached the new formed line of Negley. Here they were met by a steady and tremendous fire. The line remaining firm. Our line was formed to support them but few indeed were there to rally around the colors soiled and riddled by shot. From here we marched to a commanding point on the railroad where there had been a struggle all day for mastery. Here the splendor of battle lay spread out on the broad plain before us. And Rosecrans came to cheer us. We took position along the Pike on the left of Rousseau joining the 94th Ohio. Here I saw Tully, Jake Henkle and John Simmond dirty and begrimed with powder but safe and well. Mack Young, they reported sick and left behind. The battle continuing 'til night we changing position several times but taking our immediate part in the engagement. The enemy were successfully repulsed at every point and at dark all became quiet.

We were moved to the rear and allowed to build fires and spend the night far more comfortably than we had anticipated. The feeling in battle with one was calm determination. The danger and repulsiveness of the battle did not **effect(?)** me as I supposed. There came a desire to do my best and to this every other feeling gave way. At night after all was over there was no settled gloom upon my mind but a calm unconcerned resignation that surprised me. The battle appeared like a fresh dream and as we knew nothing of the general results it seemed as strange. General Rosecrans was in every part of the field in the midst of danger. Several of his staff were wounded or killed, among the latter Garrasche, the Adjutant General, Generals Sill and Willich killed – a possibility of the latter being wounded and a prisoner. General Van Cleve slightly wounded. Do not know much in regard to results of the battle. The enemy were driven on one flank and drove us on the other. Where our army took position they remained at night. The rebels suffered much more in killed and wounded than we as after the battle commenced they attacked us in chosen positions. Our men were in good spirits thinking of a hard won victory on the morrow.

Thursday, January 1st, 1863

Waked between three and four o'clock and marched to the outpost on the Murfreesboro Road and nearest the rebel line. Our Brigade relieving another on Picket. Each Brigade standing two hours. The morning very cold and frosty and the two hours unpleasant enough. The rebel fires in plain view and the dead of yesterday still strewing the ground. After being relieved returned to where we had spent the night and cooked breakfast. After sunrise the army in the center takes a new position making the line doubly strong. We are stationed in beautiful place near the banks of the stream, on reserve. Rosecrans today choosing to a **cross(?)** the defensive. Our line remained quiet until attacked when a furious cannonade commenced soon repelling. Firing was heard on the right and also on the left. Afternoon we changed position going farther to the left. The enemy made no concentrated attack on our part of the line but kept the skirmishers and artillery at work nearly all day. The boys killed some hogs and we had a New Years Dinner. At night build fires, draw rations of coffee, crackers and a little meat and have a rather a pleasant time. The line not as quiet as last night. Skirmishing continuing at intervals all night. Night very cold. Too cold to sleep even by a fire.

Friday, January 2nd

Waked about five o'clock and get breakfast without interruption. Soon after relieved by the 2nd (KY) and 90th (OH) and we retire to the rear, near the stream, stack arms and are allowed to rest. The regiment works by **relief(?)** building breast works. Our division being the reserve for the Left Wing. Colonel Enyart procures a beef, has it killed and divided among the companies. Line tolerably quiet, scarcely any artillery firing. About noon Negley's division moves quietly from the right to the center and takes position on our line and arrangements made to repel anticipated attack. A watch constant and careful had discovered that the enemy were moving artillery and infantry from their left and concentrating a powerful force on their right. Rosecrans supposing the object being to drive in our left and capture the artillery on the reserve. About three o'clock this supposition was proved correct for a most formidable and terrific attack was made by the enemy in solid column with an immense quantity of artillery bringing on one of the grandest, most terrible and warmly contested battles of the war. The full force of the rebels was thrown suddenly on Van Cleve's Division which after a time in part gave way. Borne back in a confused mass toward the reserve by overwhelming numbers of cheering rebels. Negley's Division now rapidly advances. Our whole line of artillery opened and the engagement became absolutely terrific. There was a constant roar, a painful concussion of air. The smoke settled all around us half hiding the contending forces but still the rebels came on in unbroken columns and for an hour all was exertion, doubt and painful suspense. It seemed as if our force must give way but Rosecrans was in every part of the field cheering and encouraging. Palmer was busy crouching like a lion for the spring and just as our lines seemed wavering a division came up double quick, cheering loudly and our lines returning the cheer charged and the division

advanced in line to support them. At last the rebel column wavered, retired slowly at first and then broke before our vigorous assault leaving a battery and several regimental colors in our possession. Another division now came up and formed quickly in line. Some adjutant grabbing one of the large rebel standards galloped along the lines, prisoners were hurried in groups to our rear, cheer upon cheer rolled in thunders along our lines. Palmer, his voice hoarse with exertion thundered “forward Reserve” and as the fresh unbroken column raised as if from the earth and rushed forward with the almost interminable line of artillery. The battlefield presented one of those sublime and terrible scenes that we cannot deem real until we see. It was one of those battles that surpass the most enthusiastic descriptions that we read in the works of brilliant authors. One that cannot be described and one that is seen but once in a lifetime. Our regiment advanced in line nearly a mile moving over open ground as the last of the reserve. *A loud cheer from us drew the fire of a rebel battery and for half an hour it pored into us a steady fire. We immediately laying close to the ground. They had our range exactly and done the best shooting I ever saw by artillery. The shot and shell striking and bursting directly over and among us, throwing mud all over us, powder in our eyes and scorching us, but our boys remaining perfectly quiet and displaying the greatest coolness in avoiding the shot.* Strange to say . . . not a man was lost, but one of the stragglers from some regiment passing in our rear was struck down by a shot and horribly mangled. General Palmer passing complemented our coolness and the boys all starting with the cry “You are right in range, General.” He coolly replied “Lie still. You are worth two or three Brigadier Generals.” The battery continued firing ‘til after dark. The shells passing like meteors through the darkened sky. We soon retired and met General Cruft who ordered us to take our old position saying “Men, we have done nobly.” The pursuit was continued for into the woods. Then our force in the center took their former position leaving our left wing far advanced and across the river or stream. The heart of the contest was at this crossing as the rebels crossed to the attack and recrossed in retreating and soon the long line of ambulances was finding its way to the place where our own and the rebel dead and wounded covered the ground. We lost comparatively but few men but in one or two places the slaughter of the rebels was fearful. Everybody from Old Rose down were in excellent humor and the general opinion was that the rebels were completely defeated. Negley’s division took position near us as before and as firing continued in front all fires were put out but as it proved to be our artillery shelling the woods they soon rebuilt. We were ordered to move but after getting ready this was countermanded. The night proved to be a raining one and we could not sleep with much comfort. Colonel Stanley’s Staff and attachés interrupted us very much by pulling down our works to get rails to form shelter and some difficulty arose about this matter. During the night waked by Thornton of the 19th (IL). He and I had a friendly chat. Night warm but full of misty rain. Much firing along the line.

*Note:
Possibly
where Busbey
wounded,
although
never
mentioned in
diary text.*