

SELMA MORNING REPORTER

SELMA, ALABAMA, TUESDAY, January 27, 1863

ARMY CORRESPONDENCE OF THE REPORTER.

IN CAMPS, NEAR SHELBYVILLE, TENN, Jan. 19th, 1863

Editor of Selma Reporter—Dear Sir—

Today the Reporter, like a refreshing shower in midsummer's drought, made its appearance in camps, much to our joy and satisfaction. Of late, our mails have been much disorganized, and in consequence, I have not received a single letter or paper from Alabama since I left in December, except two numbers of the Reporter. Hence it is quite a "god-send" to us in the way of news. Having been much exposed in our late battle and our retreat in rain, hail, snow, and the bitter cold of this inhospitable winter climate, I have been somewhat indisposed and unable to write you conveniently since the 8th inst. Indeed the whole army is suffering more or less from the same cause, with colds and the diseases consequent to colds.

Our cavalry are in our front, Polk's corps at this place, and the remainder of our troops at or near Tullahoma. The enemy still occupy Murfreesboro, but are expected soon to make an advance movement upon us. Should they do this in heavy force, and we are not reinforced, my impression is that we will fall back to Bridgeport. By "grape-vine telegraph," we learn that we are soon to be reinforced by a portion of the Virginia army. Should this happen, we can and doubtless will make a successful stand against Rosecrans at or near this place. To us, the country is much better adapted to the selection of a battle-field than at Murfreesboro, because there it was almost a continuous level plain;

here, it abounds in hills, plains, gradual slopes or what not, and we can select just such a battle-field as we desire: With an infantry force sufficient to hold the enemy in check, our “daring” champions, Morgan, Wheeler, Forrest and Wharton, with their bold and venturesome cavalry, would soon get into their rear, destroying the railroad, their wagon trains, cut off entirely their supplies, and force them, through sheer necessity, to retreat.

Well, the great battle of Murfreesboro has been fought, the keen crack of musketry and loud booming of cannon is hushed, the thick clouds of sulphurous smoke have drifted from the face of the battle field; the excitement of feeling incident thereto subsided has fully subsided, and now we are enabled to calmly survey the field and confidently speak of its results. Here, many of the South’s most chivalric and gallant sons made a libation of their heart’s best blood upon the altar of their common country.

“Ah! Many a loved one has fled
Wherein we’ll greet in joy no more—
They’ve vanished before the call of duty,
Hearing but sorrow and care.”

Fond and doting mothers, loving wives, affectionate sisters and daughters have had their hearts wrung with grief, and the scalding tears of bitter sorrow are still coursing down their care-worn cheeks at the loss of a son, husband, brother, father, who nobly fell battling for his country’s freedom in this fight. I see the enemy claim a decided victory. Our loss was quite heavy, but that of the enemy was still heavier. We certainly had the best of the fight. We killed more of their men, took more prisoners and artillery, destroyed a vast amount of their supplies and supply trains, and drove them from their positions in

battle line as long as we kept up the fight. Whether our Generals acted upon the principle that

“He that fights and runs away,
Will live to fight another day.”

or not, I cannot say, but certain it is, we finally retreated, thereby to some extent demoralizing our army, and losing much of the prestige of our victory, so far as its effect and influence upon the outside world is concerned.

Just here, permit me to speak of a novel movement of our army on the 31st ultimo, which greatly disconcerted the enemy, and doubtless had much to do in crowning our arms with such brilliant success on that day. On the 30th, sufficient skirmishing and fighting had occurred to disclose to the enemy our entire battle line—hence, on the night, we could distinctly hear them disposing their troops and artillery in battle line for a forward movement on the next morning. Little did they dream that, at the same time they were thus preparing for our defeat and destruction, our wary Generals were holding a council, and making a plan that was to eventuate in their discomfit. The plan (the suggestion, it is said, of Gen. Polk) was to make flank attack upon the enemy's whole line at early dawn on the morning of the 31st, by a right and left wheel, by divisions,— This plan was carried out on our left, by its attacking the enemy's right flank. It took them by surprise, threw them into considerable confusion; and when hard pressed they were forced to retreat over ledges of limestone rock and through thick cedar groves, sometimes having to abandon their artillery entirely, and at others, rendering it almost useless to them. On our left Cleburne's and McCown's Divisions made a right wheel by divisions, and Withers' Division made a right wheel by brigade which brought each of his brigade directly in the fight as the enemy's line was near us; however, it

was that Wilder's Division had the hardest fighting to do, and sustained the greatest loss. On our right, which was to attack the enemy's left by a left wheel by division, the plan for some reason was not executed.

On the evening of the 31st, after we had driven the enemy back up the whole length of Cleburne's, McCown's and Withers Division, while we were engaging them on the Nashville Pike, where they had a strong position in a piece of woods in the midst of an open field, I saw the most gallant charge that my eyes ever beheld. It was made by a brigade (what one I could not learn) in which was the 32nd Alabama Regiment, commanded by Col. Harry Maury, of Mobile. The brigade moved up in splendid order through an open cotton field, against a terrible fire of artillery and musketry—still onward and onward did they move in the same good order though their ranks were thinned at every step, firing the while. Volley after volley with telling effect into the enemy's ranks, until they came in almost direct contact with the enemy's bayonets, and valiant Maury himself leading the charge, with the banner of the stars and bars in his own hands, flouting proudly above his head. Col. Maury fell, and the brigade retired from a fire which human endurance could no longer brook, and reformed again in good order in open view of the enemy's line. On the evening of the 2d January, after we had got possession of this field, I rode over it and counted over fifty of our brave boys who had fallen in this single charge.

In a former communication, I called attention to the subject of desertion. Pardon me for the mention of it again. Go to the muster rolls of any regiment in this army, and I venture the assertion that over one half of the enlisted men will be found to be absent from their commands, some at home on furlough, some absent sick, and many at home marked on the rolls as deserters. Such is state of things in this

hour of our struggle, when independence and recognition are almost within our grasp. When the services of every man are more needed than at any former period of our existence as a nation, is wholly inexcusable, and unworthy of proud chivalric and brave soldiery. Those who are absent sick, unable to do duty, are excusable; but those who are absent and able to return to duty and those who are about as deserters ought to be frowned down by a patriotic public at home, and forced back to their commands. Let the press speak out in thundering tones—let the ladies—(God bless them,) whose genial influence has always had a controlling power over the actions of men refuse to countenance them. Let the just indignation of the whole community drive in a sense of their duty, soldiers who will thus set and thus jeopardize all that we have gained by our skill and valor in this way. Let army surgeons and conscript officers be more vigilant and active, and do their whole duty by arresting, if need be, these men and sending them back to their commands. Let the time soon come when every soldier of the sunny South shall adopt as his motto,

“We are volunteers for the war, boys

We are in for the end of the fight,

We will conquer a glorious peace, boys,

Or die in the cause of the right.”

Very respectfully, yours, M.H.S