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Unit: 15TH WISCONSIN INFANTRY

List Contents of Donation Below:

- (Library) 1. COLONEL HEG & HIS BOYS - 2000 TRANSLATION OF THE 1916 NORWEGIAN VERSION BY AGER. PUBLISHED BY NORWEGIAN AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSN
2. XEROX COPY OF 1999 TRANSLATION OF O.A. BUSLETT "THE 15TH WISCONSIN" (NORWEGIAN) COPY PROVIDED TO ME BY MARCOM RASHOLT
3. Civil War Letters of Hans Christian Heg.

The Fifteenth Wisconsin

by

O. A. Buslett

Translated by Barbara G. Scott

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The
Fifteenth Regiment
of
Wisconsin Volunteers

Collected and edited by
O. A. Buslett,

who with this work has attempted to provide a memorial over the graves of the fallen
and shed historical light over the survivors' greying crowns.

Dedicated to the Norwegian people in America

Published by the author.
Printed by B. Anundsen, Decorah, Iowa.
[1894]

Translator's Note

In translating this book I have tried to retain the flavor of the original. Therefore, I have retained the sometimes long and involved sentence structure and punctuation style of the original, as well as its wordiness and organization. The book is not clearly structured and I have done nothing to the text itself to change that. However, in an attempt to make the narrative a bit clearer for the reader I have indented all the letters, reports, quotations and descriptions that are from someone other than Buslett and have also put them into a different font.

Buslett was not consistent in the spelling of names, whether of people or places. Where I am quite certain of the correct spelling of a place, I have included Buslett's version only the first time the name appears, along with the correct spelling in brackets; in subsequent cases I have replaced his version with the correct spelling. In some cases Buslett mentions places that do not appear on any map I have found. In these cases I have included a footnote suggesting the possible location. (Buslett's footnotes are numbered; mine are marked with a "#".) With people's names I have usually corrected the spellings when I am sure which individual he was referring to, but I have left a few of the variants as examples.

I have included a number of translator's notes in the footnotes. These are meant to clarify Buslett's text by adding historical information from another source or to highlight problems in the translation. Buslett used a few terms which appear in no Norwegian dictionaries available to me; in these cases I have made an educated guess about the meaning, but have provided the Norwegian term in the footnote.

I have capitalized "Regiment" when the word refers specifically to the 15th Regiment. Like Buslett, I am not well-versed in military terminology. I have tried to translate military terms correctly, but there may be some inaccuracies. This is especially true in those cases where

he is quoting a report originally written in English; I have not had the time or resources to go back to the original documents, so these passages have been translated twice—first into Norwegian, by Buslett, and then back into English, by me.

There are a few examples of poetry and lyrics in Buslett's text. I have only tried to convey the meaning of the lines and have not provided truly poetic versions of the originals.

I have put the table of contents at the front of the book rather than in the back as in the original. The list of the photographs found in the original is also at the beginning of the translation. Throughout the text I have noted in brackets where the photographs were placed in the original, along with the page numbers in the original.

I would like to thank those individuals who provided valuable assistance in clarifying several Civil War terms. I would also like to thank Ingrid Urberg and Tanya Thresher for their help in translating several difficult passages, especially the poetry. Finally, this translation would never have been completed without the initiative and sponsorship of Malcolm Rosholt, and the assistance of Bob Larsen. I am sure that the resulting work will be appreciated by the many people interested in the Civil War in general, and in the 15th Wisconsin Regiment in particular, and special thanks are due to Malcolm Rosholt for undertaking to have the translation completed.

As always, any mistakes are the responsibility of the translator.

Barbara G. Scott
Ripon, Wisconsin
June 1999

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To the Reader:

A few lines to the reader are perhaps necessary. This work is a collection, which an historic work almost ought to be. The compiler therefore makes no claim to being original; rather, he will deliver bits and pieces of what has already been written—historically speaking—about the same subject. He will provide a somewhat free translation of the war reports from the 15th Regiment, extracts from letters and diaries borrowed from veterans, and likewise from newspapers, from oral communications and reports from men who were present or who were very interested in that time's debates and battles, and from the Rolls and so forth.

With the permission of Senator J. A. Johnson I have used part of his book about the same Regiment along with what could be obtained from Colonel Johnson's (Skipnes) writings about this subject.

As far as biographies and anecdotes go, these were primarily collected by traveling among and speaking with the veterans.

Of that which can already be found in print, most is rather carefully written; but the language is not easy and therefore doesn't reach the general public. For this reason, what is used here is written in another style. It should not be understood that the style used here shall be a model style; the compiler intends only that it should be easy for the majority to understand.

Several military terms that appear here are perhaps not used in a way that a knowledgeable military person would deem correct because the compiler is not a military man and is therefore not the right person to handle a military subject. But there is no one who could work with greater pleasure and interest in the subject than the compiler. Those who served in the Regiment who had the necessary ability for such a project are either dead or too old, and of the younger relatives who have any literary interest, most are occupied with other projects or are so Americanized that they have forgotten Norwegian. But Norwegians in general, both young and old throughout the northwest states, still read and love their mother tongue, and

many will send this book to relatives and friends in our unforgettable Fatherland; therefore, this book is written in Norwegian.

The compiler's original intention was to report to the best of his ability a few stories and anecdotes from the days of the war; but traveling among the veterans and others has given him the duty of writing a passably complete history of the Regiment. This demand for such a history was made by so many that the compiler realized that if his book only gave disconnected descriptions and anecdotes it would not be satisfactory.

There has been little time available and the work is far from easy; if it has then been possible to produce something that the Norwegian-American people find pleasure in, then that is due essentially to the popular subject which is treated here.

The 15th Wisconsin was a golden piece on the Civil War's great chessboard, and there were Norwegians not just in this Regiment but in almost all the regiments from Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota and in many of the Illinois regiments. Yes, if all the Norwegians had enlisted in the same way as the 15th Wisconsin, then we could write a history of great wonder and admiration. The mistake was that our Norwegian boys did not all march together under the Norwegian flag that the 15th received in Chicago on their departure. If only the idea of collecting all the Norwegians in one regiment had come a little earlier or had been taken up by several capable leaders, the Rebels would soon have cried: "God deliver us from the fury of the Norwegians!" That this is true, and not just wild fancy, is shown by the following:

When the Regiment had made camp late one evening under the mountain known as Rocky Face Ridge and had made its coffee, a Rebel called down and asked for some of the coffee.

"Come and take it!" answered the 15th.

"Who are you?"

"The 15th Wisconsin."

"So we can walk straight out of the realm of the Rebels and into Hell; but you would undoubtedly come after us and drive us out of there also," said the Rebel, and he withdrew.

One thing is quite certain: relative to population, scarcely any nation was so greatly and bravely represented in the war as the Norwegians—one can well say the three Scandinavian countries.

It is not certain who first brought forth the idea that the Scandinavians ought to be collected in their own regiment.

Senator J. A. Johnson has the honor for first putting the idea forward publicly, and perhaps he had conceived it at the same time as a few others.

Hans C. Heg said, when Mr. Johnson mentioned his idea to him, that he also had thought about this for some time. But Pastor Hatlestad, from whom the compiler has received valuable information about Hans Heg, said that he "had thought about and certainly also spoken about how good it would be to form a Norwegian Regiment."

It is therefore probable that the idea originally came from him because once something is said, something which awakes interest, then it goes on until it finally finds its spokesman. Senator J. A. Johnson is certainly the man who carried the idea forward.

If this book now gives a little pleasure to the old, grizzled, furrowed, and suffering among those who suffered so much from the war's hardships, then the compiler's wish is fulfilled.

Respectfully,
O. A. Buslett.

Cursory Overview of the Political Battlefield Just Before the War

What was it that our fine veterans fought for? Were they right?

Today these seem like unnecessary questions, but perhaps it is not actually so ridiculous to answer them with a short historical summary. There are still people here who do not have such a good grasp of the case that they can give an explanation of why the Rebels were not just as correct as the soldiers in the blue coats; they just have the feeling that those who followed where the red, white and blue flag waved for heaven's reward were right. And they were—they were morally right, though not exactly in the sense of the ancient Jews' moral right; the slave owners could indeed boast about that. But the Union's people had the modern human's more noble morality and brighter view of life: "Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood." The right and morality with which the Northern states met and defeated the enemy is derived from these three words.

According to the law which was in force at the time, it is not quite right to say that the South did not have a case; in any case the laws were interpreted in the South's favor. The Supreme Court maintained in the famous Dred Scott case that slaves were property, and that the Constitution also allowed forced labor. Of course, the slave owners believed that they were entirely within their rights when they took their property—the slaves—along to any state in the union and disposed of them here or there as they saw fit. But it has been sufficiently established that they were not correct in their belief:

"Slavery is contrary to the Constitution's fundamental idea and to the Declaration of Independence's clear statement that every person has the right to freedom and the opportunity to support himself."

But slavery was now a custom and it was not so easy to abolish it. The direct reason for the war was not the abolition of slavery, but the question of whether an individual state had the right to secede from the Union. This question would certainly never have arisen if not for

slavery, so it was in any case that serpent that hollowed out the marrow of the core of our civilization and was the indirect cause of the world's bloodiest war.

In the South, slaves were held to be property, as noted above, and the owners wanted to be able to bring their property with them, undisturbed, anywhere in the Union as long as they themselves belonged to this Union, and they claimed that the Northern states did not have the right to hinder them in this because one of the amendments to the Constitution says: "No one may be deprived of his property without due process"[#], and this is what the Supreme Court decision in the Dred Scott case followed. The Northern states would not tolerate this, which cannot be wondered at; for them it was clear that if the slave owners could take their slaves wherever they wanted to within the country, like other property, then the whole country would soon become a slave country, and the Republicans refuted this decision of the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott case with the following reasoning:

"The keeping of slaves does not fall under the right to own property, but under the arrangement of labor conditions; it is one of the original models for the way in which one social class harvests the fruits of another's labor. In a civilized society the keeping of slaves cannot be defended on the basis of the possibility that a person can be made into a slave because this can only happen through the exercise of raw power; but a state society exists precisely to make sure that raw power will not be decisive."

The Southern states wanted to secede from the Union. The Secession Party could point to the law and the Supreme Court decision and say, "We are in the right." But the Union Party could also point to the law, which says that every person has the right to freedom and the opportunity to support himself, and point to the human and moral right—and this law and this right is law and right forever.

If slavery were just an arrangement of the conditions of labor, then this would concern only the individual states, and if the South wished to retain this arrangement then it would be up to them; but they had no right to practice it in those states which did not wish to maintain

[#] Translator's note: This is Buslett's version of part of the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution.

this arrangement, and a newly formed state would likewise have the right to decide whether it wanted to approve such a system of labor or not.

After Abraham Lincoln was elected President, the question of secession from the Union became the most important one for the South, although there had been no assertion that there would be any interference in the internal affairs of the Southern states, and Lincoln even maintained that the Constitution's command regarding returning escaped slaves should be upheld in the free states.

It can be seen, therefore, that the Southern states did not have the right to secede because there had been no violation of the law, and if one state had the right to practice slavery, then clearly another state had the right not to practice it. But the South saw that the North would be too strong in the near future; the mass immigration to these states and the bordering territories was a thorn in the flesh for the South. In a few years these states and territories would come to dominate and would soon be in a position to command the South as they wished; therefore the goal was to win free entry into the Territories.

Texas and part of California were conquered from Mexico, the former immense territory entered the Union as a slave state, and the Slavery Party had a reasonable hope that California would also be made a slave state; yes, the proponents of slavery were so sure of this that many of them had moved to the Golden State with their slaves. But this territory applied to enter the Union as a free state, and in spite of the intense opposition of the Slavery Party, California was incorporated as such.

The Secession Party could therefore not interfere here, but intended to conquer territory to the south and therefore be in a position to be a match for the North, however powerful they might become, because they wanted to secede and they now had in their power all the post offices, toll booths, mints, and almost all the forts and arsenals in the South. Buchanan had sent almost all the weapons and other military equipment from the Northern arsenals to the South, had sent our warships to distant waters, and had stationed our small army among the

Indians when he left the Presidency with the declaration that it was unconstitutional to secede, but that the government, according to the Constitution, could not prevent this by force.

The Rebels immediately prepared themselves to take all the forts in the South which were still were in the hands of the Union, among them the fortifications in Charleston which Commander Major Anderson still held in direct contradiction to Buchanan's orders. They erected batteries so they could control Fort Sumter, where there was a fortification with 70 men.

The President had ordered his subordinates to take a strong defensive position, and Major Anderson waited patiently for the enemy to finish constructing its batteries and open fire.

Beauregard commanded the Rebels at Charleston and he got orders from Jefferson Davis to open fire on Fort Sumter; Edmund Ruffin, an old Rebel from Virginia, fired the first shot.

This news spread like a prairie fire over the Northern states. Here all partisanship was blown away; Republicans and Democrats shook hands and took a solemn oath to enforce the laws, and demanded to be led against the Rebels. When the call came for troops, the beat of the drums was heard throughout the whole country, and its best and strongest young men flocked to the ranks.

This was a matter that the Scandinavians followed with great interest; America was now their Fatherland, and one can safely say that among the Scandinavians the Norwegians stood in the front.

Only a few Norwegians—and those were from the slave state of Texas—joined the Rebel army, but the respectable ones competed to join the Union army. There was still hot blood and great courage in these boys! Many went to war, but few came home. Many were left behind in foreign graves, but the few who came home came triumphantly, while the Stars and Stripes, free and saved, flew over the whole land.

Much of interest could be written about the initial outbreak of the War, about the firing on Fort Sumter and about Major Robert Anderson and his brave troops' perseverance and honorable capitulation, about the Battle of Bull Run where the Northern states suffered

defeat—perhaps in great part because the enemy responded powerfully with their Rebel yells, igniting such terror in the blood of our army that nothing on earth could have prevented them from breaking into flight in spite of the fact that the enemy was driven back step by step; but when they did not get the support they had hoped for, their courage failed them.

This has nothing to do with the 15th Regiment of the Wisconsin Volunteers, except that it contributed to putting steel in their hearts.

How the Regiment was Formed

On the evening of 15 September 1861, several leading Scandinavians—among them Hans C. Heg—met in the "Capitol House" in Madison, Wisconsin, and they decided to form a Scandinavian regiment.

A month before, on the governor's advice, Mr. J. A. Johnson had made public in *Emigranten* a call for volunteers to form a Scandinavian company, and O. C. Johnson had been named captain in charge of recruitment. K. K. Jones said that two Scandinavian companies could be formed in Illinois, and he wanted the company that was formed in Madison to join forces with them.

The subject was discussed thoroughly at the meeting. Jones was also there. He was not Scandinavian himself, but his wife was, and he thought that connection should give him the right to be there. The meeting ended with a recommendation to the governor that Hans C. Heg should be appointed colonel and K. K. Jones lieutenant colonel. The recommendation was followed and the appointment of officers was turned over to Heg and his friends.

The recruiting began when the hardest work of harvesting was over, and it went quickly, although the enlistment allowance was not much. Young, strong-willed youths who glowed with courage and love for such a great cause reported for service. It did not take long before the various captains had their companies ready.

Colonel Heg had his headquarters in Waupun, Fond du Lac County, through the autumn, and this was the site of the first meeting or rendezvous. But in December he moved to Camp Randall in Madison. Here barracks were built in all haste, and it was cold so the soldiers froze and their teeth were chattering. Rations were scarce and the cooking was so-so—a new soldier does not understand the art of cooking—but there were no serious complaints.

In January 1862, the Regiment was full and wanted only to be sent against the Rebels, although it had not yet been properly registered.

In February came the news that Forts He[n]ry and Donaldson had fallen, and many in the Regiment were afraid that they would never see action. But soon came orders to leave as quickly as possible for St. Louis, Missouri.

The soldiers had had to live on credit the entire time, and now there was life among the city's Jews! They heard that the Regiment would leave without receiving the periodic payment of greenbacks. Nevertheless, the paymaster came on 1 March and began to pay the Regiment. It was busy that day! They were to leave the next day and the creditors stuck like glue to the paymaster's table.

Then the soldiers intended to go into town and say good-bye to family and friends. But there had been strict orders against giving leave to any enlisted man, and patrols were sent to arrest all who belonged to the Regiment, pass or no pass, and many received an undeserved stay in the guardhouse. Naturally, they were released at once by their officers, but this was unfortunate all the same since they were to leave home immediately.

Sunday morning, 2 March, dawned dark with rain and snow—it came as a portent of bloody days and cold nights, of all of war's suffering and horror—it was hardly suited to building courage, and it may well be that one or another of these young boys dried away his tears. Now there were memories of home, of Father and Mother, of sister and brother and other loved ones, which demanded filial tears and a soft heart.

At about eight o'clock in the morning the Regiment stood in ranks and marched to the train station, where friends had come to say good-bye and good luck on the journey. Parents and

siblings, wives and children, cried as well as sweethearts, and the brave soldier has no shame in the tears he sheds at such a time.

In the best man
I truly glimpsed
that tears fell for the noble ones.

"All aboard!" The soldier takes his seat in the car and now they are on the way to the battlefield!

Before we follow the Regiment any further, we will make a quick trip inside Camp Randall.

Camp Randall, Madison, Wisconsin

Camp Randall lies by the city's west side, just inside the city limits. It is here that Dane County holds its fair. Both before and after the Civil War the place was used as an exhibition site for farm products, purebred animals, machinery and more; but during the war it was used as a training camp. The site is approximately 30 acres and can best be described as a triangle, of which one corner, which lies towards the city, is cut off. It is enclosed by a board fence which is now dilapidated; on the north side it has been expanded approximately six rods—a good hundred feet—since the war. Since that time many long, whitewashed exhibit halls have been built which are now near ruin; here everything has been neglected.

A road winds its way through the camp like a big Latin "B" with the right line towards one of the exhibit hall's seating areas, where the sport-loving public follows the race horses with wonder and cheers! This rather insignificant building stands on a rounded mound where the eight-sided training building stood, just across from the drill ground. On the mound, closer to the eastern entrance, was the detention area, the Bull Pen—if any of the veterans remember that? To the right, in the northwest corner and close to the northern entrance, was the morgue (the Dead House), and a little to the left, when we go in through the same gate, the Mess Hall [the Mess House] stood directly in front of this entrance. Up a little incline, where

there is now a pitiful barn and water pump, we stand on that ground where Colonel Heg had his headquarters. The lower hospital lay a little nearer the entrance, the upper a little to the west up the slope.

From the spectator stands on the round mound we see to the east the roof and dome of the capitol and some church towers; to the southeast, part of Lake Monona; to the south, a rather common landscape; to the northeast, the hill of the University and a few buildings; and a few degrees to the north and west the hill with the observatory, and behind a grove part of Lake Mendota. On the opposite shore shine the roofs and domes of the asylum, and in the background (to the west) is a hill with an oak forest which blocks the view from Camp Randall, but behind it lies Forest Hill Cemetery, and many soldiers rest here in eternal sleep.

Camp Randall is neglected, as I said, and it will not occur to anyone who visits this place for its natural beauty, or, for that matter, the famous city, to take a little walk here except for an old veteran or two. But from the hills in the vicinity the view is enchanting; here, from the old camp, only so-so. The place could be beautiful; there is rich soil here and if trees were planted along the road, if other fences and other buildings were built, then the Norwegian-Americans could raise a memorial at Camp Randall to those of their brothers who were killed or wounded in the Civil War, and to those few who returned home victorious. It was here that the 15th Regiment of Wisconsin Volunteers learned military drill and discipline and learned that quite simple fare is rather good to begin with, when one must accustom oneself afterwards to hunger and thirst which so often could not be avoided during the long, difficult marches. But here there was beer, then as well as now, and if a soldier emptied a toast at his discretion with his brothers in arms for the Fatherland, Freedom and Battle, for future victory, it is not to be wondered at, and there was certainly more than one who did that.

So it was from here that the courageous 15th departed in cold, wet, windy weather that March morning in order to fight in the Union's brave army for a great cause, for a great and glorious Fatherland.

Most of these were Norwegian farmers, or perhaps more correctly: former Norwegian crofters and their sons, farm boys and workers—military officers and enlisted men—who after some months' training defended their honor, and that with brilliance in battles as bloody as any country's history can boast of.

Summary of the History

The members of the 15th were Norwegians—with few exceptions—and most were from the state of Wisconsin. They were sent in units to Camp Randall, where the organization of the Regiment was carried out under Colonel Heg's leadership.

The Regiment left the state on 2 March 1862 with orders to go to St. Louis, Missouri.

On the way to Chicago the train was delayed five hours because of the heavy snow that fell that day. In the evening, around nine o'clock, the train arrived and a fuss was made of the Regiment. The *Nora Forening* (the Nora Society) presented it with a beautiful banner. After a three-hour stay they continued by train to Alton. On this trip Private Stark Larson, who no doubt was drunk, went out on the platform and fell off. It was assumed that he was killed, but a few months later Stark Larson returned to the Regiment.

Around five o'clock in the afternoon on the third, the train arrived in Alton and the soldiers immediately went on board the steamship *City of Alton*; the next morning they bore down the Mississippi to St. Louis.

Colonel Heg had orders to report to General Halleck, and was ordered by him to go on board the steamship *Continental* at Bird's Point, Missouri. The soldiers had to sleep on deck; the weather was cold and since they could not light a fire they were very cold. But they wanted their fun anyway, and when the steamship neared a small town where the inhabitants

were gathered on the shore, waving their hats and handkerchiefs, one soldier raised the Norwegian flag that Company A had been given in Chicago. The hats and handkerchiefs fell! The townspeople did not know what they should think of this; not another shout of applause was heard until the Regiment had gone ashore and explained who they were. But then there was action!

On the morning of the fifth they came to Bird's Point, which lies right across from Cairo. Here they were very well off; they found good barracks, which now stood deserted because there were few troops remaining here.

Colonel Heg, who was the highest-ranking officer, immediately took command.

On the 14th, Foote came down the Mississippi with his fine gunboat, and six ¹ companies from the Regiment were put on board a transport ship to follow him and take part in the siege of Island Number 10, while the remaining companies stayed behind in the garrison under Major Rise.

Island Number 10 was a fixed point in the Mississippi about 50 miles downstream from Cairo. The Island was quite small, perhaps two hundred acres. There were several batteries, but the actual fortifications lay over on the Tennessee shore.

Here the river bends, and an attack by gunboats is very difficult. At that time the land in the vicinity of the river and Lake Obion was flooded so Madrid Bend also became an island and the only way to retreat was via the river.[#]

The only part the land forces played in the bombardment of Island Number 10 was simply guard duty along a spit of land along the Missouri bank right across from the Island. Here they lay in order to prevent a surprise attack from the enemy if it was possible for him to cross. There was, in fact, enough danger of this happening to make things interesting, and here

¹In Senator Johnson's book it says seven companies; but in the records it says six.

[#] Translator's note: There is no Lake Obion on the map, although the Obion River flows through northwest Tennessee.

the boys first encountered the Rebels' shells; but these did not do any great damage and the boys in blue soon regarded them with indifference.

The water rose so they could not go ashore, but had to be squeezed together on the boats where they were very cold because they could not have a fire.

This guard duty on the transport vessels lasted for 25 days without any break except for a two-day trip to Union City.

On 30 March the Norwegian Regiment and the 27th Illinois departed from the landing place across from Island Number 10 with the steamship *Graham and McGill*. After an hour's sailing up the river they landed at the small town of Hickman, which lies spread picturesquely up over the rocky, uneven hills. Around nine o'clock the troops disembarked and soon set out in the direction of Union City. The people of the town, who for the most part were Secessionists, were silent—but scarcely indifferent—observers to the troops' departure because the great number of the artillery and cavalry taken from Hickman meant something serious was afoot.

It was a beautiful sunny day, almost too warm for the strenuous march after a long period of inactivity. But the soldiers were in great humor and went singing and laughing over the hills with the great packs on their backs.

The procession was almost two miles long. Two companies of Illinois cavalry rode ahead; after them followed the 27th Illinois Infantry; after this a battalion with six cannon; and finally the Norwegian Regiment under Colonel Heg.

Colonel Buford commanded the entire force, about twelve hundred men.

Union City lies in Tennessee, a distance of 16 miles from Hickman, Kentucky. The route went through thick forest the entire way. But on both sides land was cleared for the most part.

It was summer here; pasture and winter wheat stood high and had the greenest of green color. Rows of peach trees, of which there were often large orchards by the houses, were full of light pink flowers, and in the surrounding forest the leaves were already out.

Whites and blacks stood behind the fences along the way to watch the troops pass by; the former most often with surly faces, while the Negroes, on the other hand, seemed to regard the procession with considerable satisfaction.

One member of the Regiment asked a Negro, who was sitting on the fence with some friends, who lived in the house.

"The man's name is Sloan, sir."

"Do you belong to him?"

"No, I belong to Sam White, who lives up there in the red brick house."

"Can one get tobacco here?"

"No, but Sam White has a whole barn full."

"Is he a Rebel?"

"Yes, he's a Rebel; I don't think it's a sin to empty his barn," said the slave; he had gotten courage from the presence of the troops and they spoke with that spirit all the time.

For a long way the route was easy—along the train track that goes from Hickman to Union City—but it had not been used for a long time.

The procession was now only seven or eight miles from Union City, but there wasn't an enemy to be seen.

Around eight o'clock in the evening they halted at a plantation only four miles from the destination. It had been dark for some time, and the supply wagons only proceeded with the greatest difficulty along the poor, narrow route. In the greatest silence and without lighting a watch fire the soldiers lay in the field, fully clothed and wrapped in their blankets, weapons lying close by.

Around four o'clock the next morning they were on their feet, without having been disturbed during the night, and the soldiers thought nothing of lighting a fire and making coffee.

Right after dawn the procession marched on in the same order as the previous day. The route was so narrow that it would have been difficult for two wagons to drive past to each other

through the huge, thick forest, and it was odd that the enemy allowed anyone to come so close to his camp without putting the least obstacle in their path.

A force of 50 men, each with an ax, could have felled so many trees across the route in just a few hours that it would take a whole day to clear the way for the artillery.

Some thought, therefore, that the Rebels had already deserted Union City, while others thought that they lay in ambush.

Our cavalry guard immediately began to fire on the enemy's outposts, who ran back without answering with a single shot.

The 27th Illinois was in battle array when the Norwegian Regiment came up. Colonel Heg asked whether there were any orders. When the answer was no, he immediately had the Regiment move out at full speed and form a battle line to the left of the Illinois regiment.

The artillery maintained heavy fire for some time, but the infantry did not fire a shot.

The Rebels had been outwitted, and they fled in confusion. Colonel Buford then gave orders to burn the camp. After a few minutes all that remained was a tent here and there; the rest was a smoldering pile of ashes which was not safe to pick through since every once in a while a burned rifle or revolver went off in the pile. Packages and satchels full of live cartridges burst all around. But the desire to get a souvenir from the trip conquered their fear, and those of the 15th who had the opportunity dug as much as they could out of the fire.

Behind one of the tents two Norwegians stood rather cold-bloodedly and changed clothes; they threw away their old underwear and instead put on the clean white linen.

Thus went the Regiment's first victory. It was a rapid incursion into enemy territory and under circumstances that must have given the soldiers reason to believe that there would be bloody foreheads.[#] The Norwegians were not quite satisfied, although they had to admit that they had done very well. Many of them did not like the fact that they did not get to exchange

[#] Translator's note: The word *Pande* (pl. *Pander*, modern *panne*) can mean both forehead and bloody firepan on a gun. Clearly both meanings would be appropriate here.

fire with the enemy; they also thought that the burned property with an estimated value of thirty or forty thousand dollars could just as well have been salvaged as burned.

The Rebel force was at least as big as the Union's, and the spot lies by the railroad and was also in connection by telegraph with points to the south from where a large force could have come in a short time.

The force achieved its goal since the enemy was scattered and the camp destroyed.

Twelve to fourteen prisoners were taken and about a hundred horses and mules.

Two artillery men were wounded when one of their own shells blew up at the wrong time. Otherwise there were no losses. The ambush was so complete that the Rebels' outposts would not believe that it was their enemy's cavalry they saw until they were fired on.

When the cavalry rode into the camp, the Rebels had just gotten up and were eating breakfast, but they hadn't had time to eat much—throughout the camp long tables were set with food, and in several places the bread was next to the fire ready to be baked. Some of the victors got a good breakfast, but most thought it safest not to eat; the food could well be poisoned as had been the case elsewhere in Missouri.

The Regiment came back to its previous camp across from Island Number 10 without mishap.

Its strength on this mission was made up of:

Company A: Captain Torkildson and 51 men; Company B: Captain Johnson, 1st Lieutenant Mathison, 2nd Lieutenant Wilson and 50 men; Company C: 1st Lieutenant Hanson and 2nd Lieutenant Rise with 58 men; Company K: Captain Grinager and 1st Lieutenant Skofstad with 53 men; Company E: Captain Ingmundsen and 2nd Lieutenant J. M. Johnson with 45 men; Company F: 1st Lieutenant Simonson with 45 men; Company G: 1st Lieutenant Henry Hauff and 2nd Lieutenant Montgomery with 38 men; Company H: Captain Seim and 2nd Lieutenant Johnson with 42 men; Company I: 1st Lieutenant Cook and 2nd Lieutenant Russell with 38 men and seven musicians. All together there were 422 men and 17 company officers. Of

regimental officers there were Colonel Heg, Adjutant Borchsenius, Dr. Himoe and Chaplain Clausen.

In the meantime a canal was dug over the tongue of land at New Madrid, and the transport vessels were brought through in order to carry troops to the Tennessee bank so they could approach the rear of the enemy force that lay on the Island. But the Rebels' batteries controlled the river and these troops had to be silenced before anything could be done.

In order to accomplish this the gunboat had to sail past the Island, but the canal was not deep enough for this. In the evening, around 10 o'clock, on 4 April, the *Carondolet* began to float noiselessly downstream. The night was dark and the boat came quite near the Island before it was discovered; the Rebels opened fire with their cannon, but they shot into the air and not a single shot hit the boat.

When the boat had come out of danger, the remaining uneasiness was relieved by three cannon shots—the agreed-upon signal that all was well.

And then all became still.

On the evening of the sixth there was a torrential rainstorm with thunder that seemed to rend the sky.

At about the same time as on the evening of the fourth, one could have seen another dark monster floating downstream [the *Pittsburgh*] with a coal barge loaded with hay on the side exposed to the firing.

This caution had also been observed the first time. This time the Rebels were more alert, and the boat was barely in motion before the rifle fire from the uppermost battery sounded the alarm, and within moments 60 to 70 cannon—from the small six pound field piece to the 128 pound siege cannon—began to send a storm of bullets and shells down on the doomed boat.

The crash of the shells in the trees on the far side of the river, the thundering explosions of the cannon, the gleaming lightning and thundering blows, Heaven's crashing artillery, all produced a terrifying din, but at the same time had a solemn effect.

Slowly, the dark monster floated down the river, breathing, snorting, as if contemptuous of the vain attempt to destroy it. The monster went through the danger safely; a single shot hit the load of hay.

The Rebels still had time to draw back, but they waited in the faint hope of preventing our troops from crossing to New Madrid.

On 7 April their batteries right across from New Madrid were silenced by the gunboats, and the crossing began.

On the eighth the Union troops were convinced that the Island was deserted and they went across immediately; the 27th Illinois landed on the Island where they found about two hundred Rebels, while the Norwegian Regiment landed on the shore of the mainland and were the first to occupy the fortifications.

The Rebels had retreated to Tiptonville, a small town five miles from the Island by land, but 20 by river. There they were captured by General Pope.

This was one of the most complete, although bloodless, victories in the whole war. Five thousand prisoners were taken along with 160 pieces of artillery, primarily siege cannon; several steamships, among them a gunboat and a floating battery of 16 cannon, which they had destroyed; and a great deal of ammunition, corn, horses and mules among many other things.

On land there were deserted camps in all directions and the troops were sent out in companies to occupy them. They found drunken Irishmen in great numbers; these had been hired as laborers, but they would not have more to do with the fate of the new Confederacy. They also found a great number of sick who had been in no shape to march. The tents still stood, and the soldiers found all kinds of goods—clothing, shoes, the finest bedclothes and a vast quantity of finery sent to the Rebel soldiers from their friends at home. There were also matches.

Two large banners were taken and sent to the state's governor.

They also discovered that the people here had heard the most exaggerated reports about the Yankee troops' brutality, and these poor people were completely surprised when they heard that they would not be insulted in any way.

The 15th was left behind as the garrison and the soldiers immediately began to collect the enormous quantity of valuables for "Uncle Sam." They kept only what they needed of bedclothes, tents, etc., for their own comfort.

They soon began to feel the effects of the suffering they had experienced on board the transport ships during the 25-day bombardment; sickness spread through the Regiment and although the nursing was good, many a good man ended his life as a soldier here.

The service was very hard because on top of the necessary outpost watch they also had to do sentry duty and build barricades both on the Island and on land.

In a few month's time, which seemed rather long, Colonel Heg got orders to leave two companies in the garrison and to support General Mitchell in Union City with the remaining eight companies.

Now there was a question of which companies would remain on the Island, since all of them were impatient. All wanted more active service; they still knew very little about war's hardships, and the battlefield was their goal.

Companies G and I², under Captain Gordon, were left behind as the permanent garrison on Island Number 10; the other companies went on board on the evening of 11 June, and around two o'clock in the morning they left with the steamship *Menco* for Hickman, and marched from there to Union City just as they had two months before, but this time in order to meet friends.

It was here they first discovered the effect their first visit had had on the Rebels; distracted and frightened, they had stuck to the forest for several days, afraid that the Yankees still occupied the place. And on the Regiment's march to Humboldt the residents along the whole way told them about escaped Rebel soldiers who had given the most exaggerated descriptions of their enemy's huge force, and these "grey coats" still slunk around in the forest, constantly in fear of further pursuit.

In Union City Colonel Heg took command of the post and also had a visit here from a certain Strømer, who later played a major roll. He wanted a post and produced

²In Johnson's book it says I and J; in the records, G and I.

recommendations from Governor Morgan of New York, from Secretaries Seward and Stanton, and from General Halleck. These men evidently thought him a smart man, and he certainly was in the eyes of the Americans; but Colonel Heg could not understand where his competence lay, and therefore did not recommend Mr. Strømer to the governor.

The man said that he had been an officer in the Slesvig-Holstein War in 1848 and he had especially distinguished himself in the battle at Fredericia, where he had taken command from a higher ranking officer and had turned the tide of the battle with a lightning strike on the enemy's defenses. In spite of this, he did not manage to make a favorable impression on Colonel Heg, and Strømer left the colonel in annoyance.

There is much more to tell about this person, but it belongs with the anecdotes.

The troops stayed almost two weeks in Union City and became acquainted with many Union-friendly families. But on 20 June³ they broke camp and marched to Humboldt. For a long stretch the route ran through low marshes, and the first day the road was terrible and they traveled only five miles.

Nothing of interest happened on this march. On the 25th they arrived in Humboldt and set up camp in an orchard, which was very comfortable. There was good farmland here, and no significant force had been encamped here before so there was plenty of everything.

Honey, butter, chickens, and meat were all very cheap. But in spite of this the bee hives, hen houses, and flocks of sheep suffered a lot because the 7th Kansas cavalry, the so-called Jay Hawkers, were there at the same time and they got the honor of taking some of these things off the farmers' hands; but to be sure, the 15th was not innocent in this either.

On 3 June they were paid for the first time since they left Wisconsin, and Companies A and H boarded a train and went to Corinth; the others followed the next day.⁴ But before they left Humboldt they celebrated the Fourth of July in a fitting manner. Besides the soldiers,

³In Johnson's book it says the 29th; but this is impossible because the troops came to Humboldt on the 25th. The records show the 25th.

⁴In the records it says that they marched to Corinth via Jackson to Clear Street, four miles from Corinth.

there was a rather large gathering of ladies and gentlemen, and speeches in honor of the day were given by General Mitchell, Colonel Heg, Colonel McKee and others.

McKee was radical in his opinions and expressed himself freely about slavery. He regarded slavery as the primary reason for the war and said that it must be abolished. Some were afraid that the citizens would be offended by his statements and attempted to stop him, but he said that it was he who had the floor now, and now that he had the opportunity—which he had wanted for so long—to explain the basis of this calamity, he would not allow himself to be interrupted by anyone. It should be remembered that the government still had not expressed itself about the emancipation of the slaves.

They stayed the night in Jackson, Tennessee, and around dinner time [the next day] they were in Corinth, Missouri[#], where they made camp on Clear Street, four miles northeast of the town.

Here for the first time they became acquainted with General Rosecrans, who was supposed to take over his corps and General Hamilton's division. On an inspection tour he also came to the 15th, and when he saw the big company crates—three or four feet square and two-and-a-half feet deep—he asked what they were used for.

"To store the company's possessions in," was the answer. He then asked if they intended to take them along on the march, and advised them to throw the crates away, the sooner the better.

The soldiers probably thought at the time that they couldn't do without these crates, but they soon learned to minimize their baggage. At that time they were allowed to have 15 baggage wagons^{##} in each regiment. On the campaign to Atlanta they had only one and managed better than in the beginning when they had 15.

[#] Translator's note: Actually in Mississippi.

^{##} Translator's note: The Norwegian word is *hæstespænd*, which is not found in any dictionary. From the general context I have assumed that each regiment was allowed a certain number of wagons or horse teams for transporting their possessions, and that as they gained campaign experience in difficult conditions they found that one was sufficient.

Here the time was used for drills. But the ground was uneven and on the whole inappropriate.

On 20 July the camp was moved to Jacinto, Missouri [actually Mississippi], where they joined Jefferson C. Davis' division.[#] While they were here, Company B had military police duty in town, and General Davis praised them for their good discipline and military demeanor.

On 10 August they marched to Iuka where they stayed for almost a week and received their second payment.

Iuka is described as a beautiful little town, and before the war it was a fashionable summer place for Southern magnates because of its mineral springs. There was a first-class hotel here, which was later converted into a hospital.

On the 17th they received orders to join the Cumberland Army, and in accordance with these orders they left Iuka on 23 August⁵ and began the memorable march that ended with the Battle of Perryville and the Rebels' evacuation of Kansas.

The troops reached the banks of the Tennessee River at Eastport (the eastern gate) towards evening on the following day, and in the morning they began the crossing on two small steamships. The march continued and they came to Florence, Alabama, on the 26th.⁶

This town is surrounded by rich farmland and is one of the most beautiful small towns one could imagine. A few larger factories a half mile from the town had now been confiscated by our authorities such that they had given security (bonds) that no work should be carried out for the Confederacy; but this obligation was later broken when the Rebels occupied this area, and General Dodge burned these factories when he once conducted a raid in this region. Here orders were given that the tents and other equipment should be examined, and they therefore had to stay here another day. The huge company crates were left behind, although with the

[#] Translator's note: This was Jefferson Columbus Davis, not the Jefferson Davis who was President of the Confederate States of America.

⁵In Johnson's book it says the 21st, which conflicts with the records.

⁶In Johnson's book: the 24th. The date in his book does not match the records, and these must be regarded as correct.

firm understanding that they would come later when they had set up camp; but they never came.

On the 28th, the march went from Florence to Nashville, Tennessee, via Columbia, Franklin and Murfreesboro—a march of 110 miles.

The soldiers lived magnificently on this trip; there was an abundance of delicious kinds of apples and peaches, sweet potatoes, green corn, etc., so they lived well even though the march was hard.

Almost the whole way from Florence to Nashville the country is densely populated and very beautiful.

The handsome, comfortable houses and the large, well-tended lawns greet one temptingly in all directions. A more beautiful landscape than that between Mount Pleasant and Columbia cannot be imagined. Here also lie the plantations of the Rebel generals Polk and Pellows. Nature has done its best to grace this Tennessee Eden, and the owners have poured money into its improvement, so nothing seems to be lacking in the wonderful gardens and expensive buildings. But the owners had left them to rebel against the government, to throw themselves into a bloody war! It seems to be just as the old saying goes: that the greedy want more, and the devil wants the most.

In Franklin they were ordered to continue the march to Murfreesboro instead of to Nashville. This made the route four miles longer. It was inspection day and they stayed here for half a day.

(To have a definite inspection day every other month was seen as necessary, and only a battle could change this. The 31st of December, 1862, was the only time it was missed by the 15th; but that was the day of the Battle of Stone[s] River.)

In the evening, rumors spread through the camp that it would be attacked, but trusting in the officers' care, the soldiers went to bed peacefully as before. Around midnight they were awakened very quietly and ordered not to raise any alarm, but immediately to be ready for battle.

Without the slightest noise the army gathered with their weapons and marched out to the advantageous positions where they awaited the enemy attack.

According to rumor, the outposts had heard the Rebels move their artillery and line it up so that they could control the camp. The flash of the cannon was expected at any moment, and in secret there was laughter over the trick that they had played on the enemy by changing their position without being discovered, because now the storm of cannon balls would fall on the empty camp!

Shortly after that orders were given to go back to the camp; a closer examination revealed that there were no Rebels in the vicinity.

The next day they came to the area around Murfreesboro. The 15th comprised the rear guard and covered the forces; a foraging convoy from the town fell in behind the baggage train and when the Regiment followed them they got lost and had to march several miles farther than the other troops. And it was after dark when the soldiers came to the camp, tired and hungry.

Murfreesboro was still almost unknown among the people of the Northern states. It was a town of three thousand people. From here it was still 33 miles to Nashville, and the troops marched on toward their goal.

Rebel General Bragg had set himself in motion to the north and it was feared that there would be an attack on Nashville. Therefore, the division received orders to be there the next morning. The Rebels had burned a bridge on the main road, so they had to make a detour of two or three miles in order to cross a small river. They marched very quickly until three o'clock in the morning; then they rested for a couple of hours, and then set off again at a quick march. Around 11 o'clock in the morning they were ordered to stop three miles from the town, since the fear of an immediate attack had now passed.

This was certainly the most difficult march they had had on the whole campaign, and since they had not had any sleep at night the heat and the dust seemed to affect the soldiers much more severely. When they reached the camp they were completely exhausted and threw

themselves on the ground underneath one or another hospitable tree, resting their tired bones for the rest of the day.

This was on 10 September.⁷

In the meantime the regular troops movements towards Ohio had been underway, and after resting in Nashville for three days, while General Buel[1]'s army passed to the north, they broke camp on the 14th⁸ and marched to Edgefield Junction, 12 miles from Nashville. They had not gone far before the rain poured down and it became so dark that they had to hold each other's hands in order to keep from splitting up. It was midnight before they came to a halt, and, wet to the bone as they were, there was still little rest. At these latitudes it is still cold at night, although the days can certainly be hot.

In the morning the march continued and was only interrupted by such nightly halts until they reached Bowling Green, Kentucky, on the 16th.

The connection with the North was now broken and General Bragg held Munfordsville, which he had captured along with four thousand prisoners.

The army now set out on a march to Louisville, taking along the few supplies they could procure, primarily some old, damaged flour.

The night of the 17th they made camp six miles from Cave City, where they expected to meet Bragg. As soon as the march continued in the morning, they met the prisoners from Munfordsville; these prisoners were now free on parole and were on the way to Bowling Green. They looked dejected and had a depressing effect on the other soldiers, but they soon regained their usual cheerfulness and went on, hoping that the time for retribution would come soon. They wanted so desperately to avenge their comrades' misfortune!

The army soon halted and some of them were pushed forward to investigate the enemy's position.

⁷In Johnson's book it says the eighth; but he is two days ahead of time on the whole march—if the records are correct, which they are without a doubt.

⁸Johnson has the 11th.

It was reported that the Rebels were present in great numbers, and everyone expected a lively battle. The army's morale was good and all were certain of victory.

The next morning they advanced a few miles and were pressed forward into the battle lines; they expected catastrophe at any minute.

At dinner time they found that the bird had flown; Bragg had withdrawn to the other side of the Green River with his entire army and all his supplies. They also discovered that their own advance guard consisted merely of one cavalry regiment at the place where they expected to meet the whole Rebel army!

The army was annoyed; it had chased the enemy so far and believed that now it would be forced into open combat.

Once again they were commanded to continue, and from now until they reached Louisville, Kentucky, they had no rest, day or night, and the soldiers had nothing to eat except for some spoiled flour, which there was little opportunity to bake. The hungry man nevertheless finds something, and it was comical to see: some used flat stones to cook their slap jacks on, others used barrel staves to put the dough straight into in the ashes, still others stuck it on their ramrods and held them over the fire. There was almost no water to speak of; there was only a little here and there in mud puddles and this usually smelled like rotten animals and other rubbish.

After much marching back and forth, they came to Louisville on 26 September and were greeted with great delight. They entered the town from the west and went up the main street through the entire length of the town.

The soldiers were filthy, tattered, exhausted and hungry, but walked with a light step through the streets! Now they were among friends! And on every street corner they were received with great shouts of applause. Flags were waving and welcoming greetings were heard everywhere. But that was not all; the food baskets of the Louisville residents were full of cakes, tarts, and other kinds of goodies. These were precious things for the hungry soldier! The soldiers were not accustomed to such hospitality and asked what the price was, but were

politely asked to help themselves to their heart's desire without money, and after the sense of well-being that follows such a good reception and good food, the soldiers were inclined to forgive all of humanity! They slept well that night!

While they were staying there, women and children came every day to dispense food to the soldiers. These soldiers did not have much money at the time, but what they had sufficed because here they could be happy, and it was very uncertain how things would go in the future.

The ragged uniforms were exchanged in part for new ones, but since all the stores had been brought safely to that side of the river, this was not done completely.

On 1 October the order came to break camp in order to meet the Rebels, who were led by General Bragg.

It was with some sadness that they left these good people after a five-day stay.

When the soldiers came to town, they found several new regiments there. All of these were well-dressed and seemed to regard the old threadbare troops with some disdain. The new troops thought it was necessary to have at least two uniforms, one for the weekend and one for work, along with two blankets and many other luxuries that the more experienced soldiers did not even dream about. Since they were also completely unused to marching, their knapsacks became too heavy and soon blankets and clothing of every description lay strewn along the road so the veterans, some of whom sorely needed one or another piece of clothing, had plenty of opportunity to help themselves.

The march was quite easy for the old veterans, but the new soldiers were taxed beyond their strength, and many of them became sick and had to be sent to the rear.

At Bardstown the vanguard bumped into the enemy's rear guard and had a small skirmish with them, but they soon withdrew and were immediately pursued.

It was a mountainous area and therefore very difficult for the artillery to advance as quickly as the infantry could. The army then advanced along three different routes: McCook's corps to the left, Chrattenden's [sic] to the right, and the corps that included the 15th in the middle. They did not meet any serious resistance before the afternoon of the seventh; then it

became clear that the enemy wanted to unite in a front against them. The enemy had taken up his position on a series of hills called Chaplain Hills in the vicinity of Perryville. The enemy controlled a small river so the Union troops could not get any water, and it was hot and dusty so they either had to gain access to the river or withdraw; there was no other water in the area. They suffered terribly, but they collected enough in all the mud puddles all around that they did not perish from thirst. The horses got no water at all.

They rested that night on their weapons.

McCook's corps had now lined up on the left side, and early in the morning⁹ the artillery on both sides opened fire and began the battle.

Around two o'clock in the afternoon the 15th was ordered to advance. The brigade it belonged to was marched up near the ground that was held by McCook's corps, where the battle raged terribly, and then marched to the right with orders to support Sheridan's division, and wriggled along the battle lines in the woods just behind an open field.

Company B was sent out for a skirmish and kept the enemy busy in the open field.

General Mitchell rode along the lines, and when he came to the Norwegians he said that he expected a good report from them.

Shortly after that they were ordered forward to meet the enemy forces. They met the Rebels at a point where the Rebels did not expect an attack, and the Rebels took to their heels in the greatest confusion. With a triumphant cry, the 15th pursued the enemy and followed him a mile and a half in a virtual race over fences, ditches, and corn fields until the enemy neared the village of Perryville. The brigade commander, Carlin, now thought that it was best not to pursue the enemy any farther, since his own people were now completely without support, and he ordered a halt.

On this forced march in pursuit of the enemy the 15th and another regiment took about one hundred prisoners, two caissons and 13 ammunition wagons.¹⁰

⁹In Johnson's book it says that they lay still until afternoon; but the records report as above.

¹⁰Johnson says 50 prisoners and two caissons, but doesn't mention the last 13 wagons.

When the prisoners were taken, they were on the way to town after ammunition and, ignorant of the presence of the "Blues," the Rebels went right in among them. The commanding sergeant protested against being detained and said that he had orders from his general to bring ammunition; but he was not a little surprised when he was politely made aware of the fact that he was no longer under his general's command.

When the enemy saw that he was no longer being pursued, he stopped his flight on the other side of the town, and there both sides began a fresh artillery attack.

While some of the brigade remained there relatively inactive, some of the foolhardy ones went into the town after water; here they met some Rebels on the same errand and there was immediately a scuffle between them. This ended up with the Rebels, of whom there really weren't so many, having to load themselves down with canteens and follow along as prisoners.

When it was dark, the 15th withdrew and again took up their position in the main line of battle.

The Regiment did not lose a single man in this battle—strangely enough!

Here a short commentary must be allowed:

It has been generally accepted that if the advantage that had been won had been pursued, and if the troops that had remained relatively inactive behind the battle lines—and these were many—had been brought forward to help, then it would have been quite easy to take the town the same evening. Likewise, if one had had a fixed position in the rear and flanks of the enemy, then cut off his line of retreat and the next day forced him into open battle under conditions so disadvantageous for him, then in all probability his army could have been destroyed and the death blow given to the rebellion in Kentucky and Tennessee. But instead of doing this the units were pulled back so the Rebels got ample opportunity to flee, which they did gladly.

Somewhat late the next morning they were again commanded to move forward.

Company B was again sent out for a skirmish, and as soon as they came into town the whole force was ordered to halt. There they were first informed that the enemy had abandoned their

honor and they could expect resistance from only one small troop of cavalry. Instead of pursuing the fleeing enemy with the two corps that had not been in battle the day before, the whole army was left in camp.

McCook's corps had suffered seriously. The battlefield was tragic to see. The Union had suffered a loss of two thousand men wounded and killed, and since the enemy was the attacker, his losses were probably bigger.

Bragg collected his whole force against McCook with the intention of completely destroying him, and he almost succeeded, while two corps remained inactive within earshot. The only help sent to him was General Mitchell's division.

Thus was the command conducted in this battle.

On the 10th they broke camp and set out for Herodsbury [Harrodsburg?], but before they got that far they found out that Bragg had not gone in that direction, and they turned back and got orders to go to Danville. Bragg had learned at Perryville that his forces could not match the Union army if it was led properly, and he was therefore determined to withdraw his men from the state as quickly as possible. His highest goal now seemed to be to delay the Federal troops in their pursuit so that he could take along the massive amount of looted goods he had collected on this campaign.

In the afternoon of the 14th, the Union troops neared the village of Lancaster where they rather unexpectedly came upon the enemy.

General Mitchell's division, of which the Norwegian Regiment was a part, was immediately pulled forward. Skirmishes between the two armies had already begun when General Gilbert, who commanded the corps, sent an explicit order to Mitchell that he should stop; otherwise he could provoke a serious encounter.

Mitchell became very irritated, as might be expected, since he knew that there could be only an insignificant force there, but the order had to be obeyed and the soldiers were ordered to put down their weapons.

The whole night they could hear the enemy's baggage train driving through town, but in the morning everything was gone—naturally!

It was now clear that the enemy's forces, which consisted of a baggage convoy followed by five hundred men, had held the whole corps off while a single brigade could have scattered them like chaff in the wind and captured of the whole baggage convoy.

The citizens of this town were strongly in favor of the Union and greeted the Union troops with flags flying and handkerchiefs waving. But the soldiers were ashamed of their corps commander's behavior and were a bit embarrassed over such a show of honor, which they did not think was completely deserved. They continued on to Crab Orchard, and there the pursuit ended.

Bragg was now on the way home through the Cumberland Gap, and there was no point in pursuing him any longer.

Here the troops got eight days of rest. The 15th then had military police duty in town. That is an honorable and easy duty.

On the 20th they left Crab Orchard, again traveled through Danville, and for a few days pitched camp by Rolling Forks near New Market, Kentucky.

The weather was now very cold, the snow lay three inches deep, and the baggage that the soldiers had had to leave in Bowling Green still had not shown up. They now marched directly to their destination.

After the Battle of Perryville, General Rosecrans was named as Buell's successor and he joined his army here.[#] Now the soldiers felt that they had a leader they could trust and who would soon help them recover their lost honor. They couldn't easily get over the fact that the Rebels had deprived them of a complete victory.

After two or three day's rest near Edgefield Junction, the 15th and the 38th Illinois regiments were sent out on an expedition under Lieutenant Colonel McKee, since Colonel Heg was now home because of illness.

[#] Translator's note: Buell was relieved of his command by President Lincoln on 23 October.

They were gone for five days and in that time they marched a hundred miles, and although there was rain and slush the whole time, they were quite satisfied because there were plenty of sheep, pigs, and chickens in the area and they could live very well.

After their return they received a communication from General Rosecrans, and it speaks for itself:¹¹

Headquarters of the 14th Army Corps.
Nashville, 22 November 1862
Special Order, Number 22.

The commanding general has noticed with great pleasure the successful expedition sent out in the direction of Clarksville by Colonel W. P. Carlin, commander of the 31st Brigade.

The two infantry regiments, (15th Wisconsin and 38th Illinois) under Lieutenant Colonel McKee of the 15th Wisconsin, marched a hundred miles over muddy roads, in constant rain without tents, and returned with 46 prisoners, 100 small arms, 18 horses and 20 mules taken from the guerrillas who plague the country. This handsome little success, which shows what good infantry can do under an enterprising leader, brings great credit to all who took part.

On the orders of Major General Rosecrans:

(signed) C. Goddard
Major and A. A. General¹²

They now pitched camp near Nashville, but nothing of interest happened, except for occasional skirmishes with the enemy when escorting the supply train, before 26 December when the campaign which ended with the Battle at Stones River and the capture of Murfreesboro began.

¹¹This letter has been lost, says Johnson; but the compiler has the honor to present it.

¹²Acting Assistant Adjutant General

Lieutenant Colonel McKee's Report

The camp of 15th Wisconsin Volunteers.
Edgefield Junction, Tennessee, 21 November 1862.

Colonel: Obeying your orders of 14 November, I left your brigade at Edgefield Junction at 3:30 Sunday morning with the personnel assigned to me: the 38th Illinois Volunteers, Major Gilmer; the 15th Wisconsin Volunteers, Major Johnson; and Lieutenant Reynolds of Company B (cavalry) of the 36th Illinois Volunteers with 10 men, and undertook to search the countryside in the direction of Clarksville.

I set out from Edgefield Junction via Goodlettsville to the Louisville & Springfield crossroads, then up Monser's Creek via Johnson's Mills, and ——— Road along the rise that leads to the old Nashville & Clarksville Road to a point near the crossroads that leads to Clarksville Road, down ——— Creek, past Dr. Rainbridge's residence to Fountain Settlement, and camped the first night by Wells Creek Meeting House, within two miles of Cooperstown.

At dawn the following morning we resumed the march via Cooperstown and from there, swinging to the left, I continued on the Springfield & Charlotte Road, a distance of about 12 miles, to the place where the Nashville & Turnersville Road crosses that road, and then the troops camped for the night near Mr. Bradley's residence.

The next morning at 3:30 the march was continued on the Springfield & Charlotte Road, crossing the Nashville & Clarksville Pike (it is not paved at this spot) by Mr. Williamson Gatewood's house, and from there to the crossing of the Cumberland River and Harpeth Shoals, a distance of about 13 miles by this route. Long stretches of this road are extremely poor and in certain places nearly impassable, and completely impassable for artillery except under the most pressing necessity. The stretch we passed through is well-supplied with forage of all kinds.

The troops returned from Harpeth Shoals via the Charlotte & Springfield Road to Mr. Gatewood's residence, and from there on the Nashville & Clarksville Road to within sight of Nashville. The latter is a good road and passable for all kinds of transport and artillery.

On this expedition the troops took 47 prisoners, 18 horses, 20 mules, 3 wagons and about 100 small arms. These were worthless almost without exception, and because of a lack of transport they were broken into pieces and destroyed, although the best were brought back to camp.

I had a distillery burned along with two residences and the adjacent outbuildings, which were without doubt used as hiding places by the guerrilla bands. In the vicinity of Harpeth Shoals I also destroyed numerous barrels of liquor and about 50 barrels of salt.

I cannot speak too highly about my troops and officers and their conduct. They marched and camped in almost ceaseless rain and deep mud without complaint and were always ready and eager for active service.

Special notice should go to Major Gilmer, 38th Illinois Volunteers; Major Johnson (Skipnes), 15th Wisconsin Volunteers; and Lieutenant Reynolds of Company B (cavalry), 36th Illinois Volunteers, for the outstanding manner in which they maneuvered and oversaw the different units. I am especially indebted to Lieutenant Reynolds and the cavalry under his command for their tireless activity in searching the countryside and for the capture of the majority of the prisoners.

Lieutenant Ferriman of the 38th Illinois Volunteers, acting quartermaster for the troops, and Adjutant Hauff of the 15th Wisconsin Volunteers, carried out their respective duties with competence and deserve credit for this.

I attach a list of the prisoners taken along with a statement of the charges against them.

I am, Colonel, with great respect your obedient servant

David McKee,
Lieutenant Colonel and Expedition
Commander

Colonel W. P. Carlin,
Commander of the 31st Brigade

Before there can be a comprehensible description of the 15th's participation in the Battle of Stones River, the entire battle must be described. It is impossible to tear the Regiment out of the big picture and just present its history when it is so intertwined with the whole. But when the battle is described, it will be possible to follow each brick and show what service the 15th provided and what honor they gained.

After the campaign ended, Rosecrans' army got a short rest and, as the circumstances permitted, was supplied with clothing and other necessities along with thirty days' provisions. Then he gave the order to move toward Murfreesboro, where the enemy's main forces lay at that time.

On the morning of 26 December he set the army in motion. General Thomas, along with Rosecrans' and Negley's divisions, marched to the right on the Franklin & Wilson Highway; McCook, along with Johnson's, Davis' and Sheridan's divisions, in the middle on the Nolensville Highway, and Crittenden to the left with Wood's, Palmer's and McCleve's divisions on the Murfreesboro Highway. The cavalry rode ahead of these various units in order to hide their actual strength from the enemy.

The morning was dark and cloudy, and soon it began to rain. It rained steadily most of the day so it was difficult to march and hard for the soldiers to keep their weapons relatively dry, but that was absolutely necessary now since there were more or less serious skirmishes the whole time. Thomas met little resistance, and Crittenden [*sic*] also saw little of the enemy, although he met some resistance in La Bergue, a small town midway between Nashville and Murfreesboro. He soon drove the Rebels away from there and pitched camp for the night. McCook met the enemy in greater numbers; Rebel General Hardee had been camped for some

time with his corps near Nolensville, some 10 miles from Nashville, and was therefore able to provide rather strong resistance, but he was completely taken by surprise. He had probably thought very little about fighting a battle since he was, together with his foremost officers, at a party given in his honor by the ladies of the area. Several messages reported to him that his cavalry had been driven back, but since nothing besides cavalry had been discovered on the other side, he paid no attention. But he soon received word that his infantry posts had been attacked and driven back, and then he understood that the Union troops were present en masse. Naturally, his officers immediately received orders to hurry to their respective units and many of them didn't even have time to exchange their ball dress for uniforms.

Hardee fell back from Nolensville to Knob Gap two miles away, where he tried to hold his ground, but to no avail. He lined up a battery of six cannon in order to deny the Union troops passage, but Colonel Carlin got orders to attack this battery, which he did immediately. The Rebels did their best to hold his men back, but were unsuccessful; the brigade of which the 15th comprised the right flank responded determinedly. This flank was well-protected against the enemy's bullets by a hill; yes, the flank was actually completely hidden from the enemy until they came very close. The Regiment could therefore advance without losses until they were right on top of the enemy, and then they quickly attacked and took one cannon, one caisson, three horses, and some prisoners. The Rebels scarcely had time to fire a few shots against the Regiment, but not one man was injured.

Night fell so it was not possible to pursue the enemy. The necessary pickets were posted and the army rested with their weapons through the night. It rained incessantly during the day, so now there wasn't a dry spot where the soldiers could rest their heads; but when one is at war one doesn't sleep on down comforters. The soldiers lay down all around on the wet ground and soon slept, perhaps just as well as the rich man with all his splendor and comfort; if the soldier has been victorious, he is satisfied. In his dreams perhaps he makes a flying visit home to those who are so close to his heart, and it may also be that he is awakened by the sound of the trumpet and is a little sad that the beautiful dream was just a dream; but he does not have

time for daydreams when the drums sound. He is not sluggish and unwilling; that is of no use. He quickly heeds the summons—it is his Fatherland that calls.

But to the matter at hand:

It was decided that the army should be put in motion early in the morning on the 27th, but such deep fog covered the valley that they couldn't do anything before 10 o'clock. After two hours' marching it began to rain again, and it was so heavy that the troops had to make camp.

In the meantime, Johnson's division—which on this day marched in front—had become certain that Hardee had withdrawn to Murfreesboro and had just left behind some cavalry in order to delay the march of the Union troops. The 28th was a Sunday, and Rosecrans let the army rest; the roads were also extremely poor after all that rain, so it is likely that nothing was lost with this Sunday rest.

On the 29th the army broke camp and by evening were just a few miles from Murfreesboro. Here the various units again combined and on the morning of the 30th, the whole army was lined up in battle formation: General Thomas, with Negley's and Rosecrans' divisions in the middle; Crittenden with Wood's, Palmer's and Van Cleve's divisions to the left; and McCook with Sheridan's, Davis' and Johnson's divisions to the right.

There were intense skirmishes the whole day, but no serious battle until evening when Colonel Carlin's brigade from Davis' division engaged in heated combat with the enemy.

McCook, who was at the forefront and led the advance, met stubborn resistance on one part of the road. The Rebels were driven back through a thicket in a cedar forest and entrenched themselves behind a fence on a small rise in order to protect a battery they had put there.

The 15th and an Illinois regiment, which comprised the front line in Carlin's brigade, were ordered to attack this battery and they made a brave start. But the fighting was too intense and, when they got support neither from the right nor the left, they were forced to retire after suffering significant losses.

The enemy's position was now discovered and it was clear that the next day would bring heated battle and there would be many bloody foreheads.[#] How many soldiers had now seen the sun set for the last time!

In the evening a conference of the generals was held at General Rosecrans' headquarters. Here the plan for the following day's operations was put before them: the main attack would be made by Crittenden, who was positioned on the right [left?] flank. Early in the morning he was to cross Stones River, attack and drive back Bragg's right flank and, if possible, take possession of Murfreesboro. This attack was to be followed by General Thomas, as the situation demanded, while McCook was only to engage the enemy enough so that the enemy would not be able to send reinforcements against Crittenden. He was to choose a fixed position where, with the greatest security, he could rebuff all attacks and, if the Rebels did not show any desire to advance, he was to hinder them from weakening this point in the Union troops' line without trying to drive them back. General Rosecrans asked Cook [McCook?] whether he could hold his position for three hours, and Cook [McCook?] answered that he could. Rosecrans then said, "It seems to me that you would be better off pulling your right flank farther back; you would not be easily outflanked then. But I leave it to you since you know the terrain. But if you think that your right flank would be safer farther back, you can move it during the night."

McCook thought his was position secure enough. The whole battle line was at least three miles long, on the left side reaching to Stones River, on the right stretching southwest at a 30 degree angle. Willick's [Willich's] brigade from Johnson's division formed the end of the line here; it was set at right angles to the back side of the main line so it protected the troops against attack in the flank, and its position lay on a wood-covered hill with open fields in front of it. The ground was rather uneven: open fields, cut through by tight cedar shrubbery, were full of rocks and stones, and in many places it was very difficult for the artillery to pass.

[#] Translator's note: Again, the word *panne* can refer to either the forehead or the firepan on a gun.

The enemy line was drawn up and on average about two thousand feet from Rosecrans' on an open hill. That the enemy had the best position is reasonable, since he had the choice of terrain.

Rosecrans' battle plan has been described. The crossing over Stones River began early on the morning of the 31st, but one could almost believe that Bragg had found out about Rosecrans' plan of attack one way or another because during the night he had drawn together the troops on his left flank, and as soon as dawn arrived he attacked the Union's left [right?] with great violence. Johnson's division was completely taken by surprise; many of the men had still not loaded their weapons and several units scarcely had time to fall in line before the Rebels were on top of them. Some artillery horses had been taken away to be watered, others still were not hitched up. Under these circumstances organized resistance was naturally out of the question, and the whole division was driven back and scattered.

The soldiers understood from the sound of the fighting how things stood on the various parts of the battlefield, and it was with great anxiety that the men in Davis' division understood from the noise that Johnson was being driven back. But they did not understand the full extent of the misfortune; they gripped their weapons, determined to stop and overwhelm the victorious enemy. Davis had to change his line in some way in order to defend against an attack in the flank, the fate that had befallen Johnson's division.

The enemy came forward with shouts and yells, overwhelming the Union. Davis' unit turned on the enemy with a terrible fire and was lucky to stop him for a short time, but had to concede to the much greater numbers which were now incited to courage by the victory so easily won up until now. Davis' division was overpowered and driven back through an open cotton field, where it reformed its line and awaited the arrival of the enemy. But many soldiers prayed in the grass of this plantation. Then came Sheridan's turn: He too, after the most intense and courageous fighting, had to retreat, but by then every one of his brigade commanders had either been killed or wounded.

Negley's division, the next in line, also had to follow and retreat through the cedar scrub.

During this whole time the main attack was being prepared, and part of the army had already crossed Stones River. This now had to be held back, and precautions had to be taken to stop the enemy's attack on the right flank. The various units here also provided the strongest resistance, although no longer with the thought that they could drive the enemy back or even stop him, but only win time to send reinforcements, which were coming from the left flank.

They were successful, and when the Rebels came near the highway they were met by fresh troops who sent fatal volleys into their ranks, which weren't just stopped, but were driven back half a mile. Here the Rebels also got reinforcements and were again successful for a short time, but were soon stopped.

Under these circumstances, Rosecrans had to form a new battle line which ran just in front of and almost parallel to the Nashville Pike. The left flank now curved back to protect the rear troops. There was a prominent hill near the railroad where Rosecrans had collected his artillery, and this inflicted such death and destruction on the Rebels that they decided to take it by storm. Four times the Rebels stormed this hill, four times they were repelled with terrible losses. They knew that when this hill with its artillery was in their hands, the battle would be won and Rosecrans' army destroyed; therefore, they made these desperate attempts to take this position, but thank God! these were in vain.

Rosecrans himself took command of this position and held it as long as the battle lasted, and it was said that it was his personal courage and ability to which the army owed its salvation that day.

The night lay dark over this scene of terror; the thunder of the cannon, the reports of the rifles were followed by the stillness of death, broken now and then only by an occasional shot from the pickets in the field.

On the left side the troops still held their original position, but the right flank had been driven back about three miles. It actually had a better position now than before since, as

mentioned above, behind them lay the Nashville Pike and in front of them an open field that was controlled by the artillery.

The army had suffered great losses of killed, wounded, and men taken prisoner, and had lost 28 pieces of artillery because the horses had been killed.

Thus ended the last day of the year 1862 for the Union army in the Battle of Murfreesboro, and those who weren't hit by the Rebels' lead could now get a little rest. Many had lost or thrown away their blankets, and fires were not allowed because they could easily give the enemy information about the army's size and position. The night was so cold, so cold, and around midnight it began to pour with rain so the soldiers became wet to the bone; this rest must have been worse than the battle that had just ended. Nevertheless, the exhausted soldier threw himself down on the ground and slept, but it couldn't be long before he awoke stiff from the cold. Tired and exhausted, he walked around in order to avoid freezing to death. At last dawn came, and the men were allowed to light fires so they could make coffee for their meager breakfast.

(Here coffee shall have its praise, no matter that it occurs in the midst of battle and in parentheses: He who hasn't been out in raw, cold weather for an extended period of time and with meager provisions, doesn't know what a cup of coffee is—even if it is quite simple, without cream and sugar—for the wet and frozen, nothing in the world tastes as good as a hot cup of coffee! It can well be called an antidote for all a soldier's suffering; nothing agrees with the mind and puts steel and courage in the body like a hot cup of coffee, when one is outside in the Lord's miserable weather and is suffering all kinds of exertion as the soldier, the sailor and so many other laborers so often are. Those who sit at home in cozy living rooms and are bored, because they don't know what they should have for their next meal, can talk about coffee's negative effect on the system and similar old wives tales; but let such people see the soldier when, cold and hungry, he takes a sip of black coffee, and I wager 99 to one they would answer, "The friend who stands beside us in our time of need is our best friend." Show me the soldier

who says that coffee was not like a good friend on such a morning as this during the Battle of Murfreesboro, 1 January 1863!)

On the evening on the 31st there was another meeting of the generals at Rosecrans' headquarters and, although some of them were dejected, there wasn't a one of them who recommended retreat.

Rosecrans had carefully examined his army's position and the terrain behind them, and had now selected a place where he could again fight off the enemy in the event that he should be driven back from his current position, and he had assured himself that he had enough ammunition to fight another battle. The rations were very short because Wheeler's cavalry had destroyed his supply train which came up from Nashville, but naturally this did not change Rosecrans' plans. The soldier can live on very little when he has to: loss and suffering, if it ends in victory, rather than living high on the hog and the shame of defeat!

Some parts of the battle line, especially on the left flank, were repositioned during the night to gain a better position, and Thursday morning, the first of January, everything was ready to meet the Rebel attack that was expected momentarily. But the day passed without anything besides a few skirmishes at certain points along the line—as if the armies wanted to assure themselves that they were still close to each other. The soldiers made good use of the time, and already by early afternoon they had erected quite substantial barricades along the whole line.

On the second, a couple of attacks were launched on their position, but they were easily repelled. One division was again sent over Stones River, and around two o'clock in the afternoon Rosecrans rode over to the left flank. He still had not given up on his favorite plan, to throw part of his army in to Murfreesboro. Around three o'clock a double line of the enemy's advance force was discovered, which came out of the woods and over the open field directly toward the position held by Van Cleve's division. These were soon followed by three solid lines of the main army marching up in the best order. The division, which was then on this side of the river, was scarcely a handful compared to this army and was therefore quickly driven

back over the river to the main line. In the meantime Rosecrans had a tremendous opportunity to move his troops on the highway that lay directly behind them and ran along the whole battle line.

As soon as he saw these columns of enemy infantry, he immediately sent orders for reinforcements from the left flank; the artillery came immediately at full speed and the infantry set off, double-time, to the place where the attack was expected. Soon there were 58 pieces of artillery present and they sent their glimmering and thundering message of death in among the enemy, but the enemy saw that the outcome of the battle depended on this attack and they forged ahead determinedly. The artillery had just made an opening in their front line when the back ranks pushed to the front and filled in the front line, whereupon the enemy pressed ahead as before.

But the closer they came to the artillery, the more fearsome was the destruction; they hesitated twice, but were again organized by their officers, and once again pushed ahead. They came right up to the river's edge, yes, some of them were already in the water, but now the artillery assault was so terrible, so unbearable, that they paused for a little, hesitated—and then turned their backs.

The Union's victorious troops now set off across the river in pursuit, while the artillery continued to send death and destruction in amongst the fleeing enemy, who now took to their heels as best they could; and weapon, packs, and everything that hindered them in their retreat was thrown away.

Carlin's brigade of Davis' division had also arrived at the camp site and took part in the pursuit, and the Rebels were driven back, long past their original position. They had now, in a scarcely a half hour, lost two thousand men and four pieces of artillery. But now night came and saved the Rebel army from total destruction because if Rosecrans had been able to exploit the advantages this victory gave him, then Bragg's army would have seen its final hour. The same could also be said without exaggeration about Rosecrans' army on the evening of the 31st; night brought advantage to both.

Friday evening it began to pour again from the clouds, and it rained all of Saturday, so the ground became so wet that the road they were to march on was almost impassable for the artillery. A lively skirmish maintained the status quo, but nothing else happened.

Saturday evening the river rose so there was a fear that it might become impossible to cross, and since the units that were on the other side were going to be cut off completely from the rest of the army, they got an order around two o'clock Sunday morning to go back across the river. The same day, Rosecrans was assured that Bragg had retreated, but the soldiers were now so exhausted after the long, hard battle, the cold and wet weather, and especially the lack of food and sleep, that he realized it was best not to pursue Bragg.

That day the supply train came up from Nashville, to everyone's great delight. The sun also appeared, as if to increase their delight. The soldiers were allowed to light fires so they could warm up and dry their clothes. But a melancholy mood gripped their minds: how many friends lay behind on the bloody battlefield at Murfreesboro! Several units were sent out to bury the dead, who until now had been in the power of the enemy. Most had been looted down to their shirts, and when nearly nine thousand bloody bodies, one's own friends, both the wounded and the dead, lie on the ground in all imaginable positions—without counting the thousands of the enemy who fell—then one has before one a sight which is enough to affect the most cheerful disposition; then one has before one the battlefield at Murfreesboro!

Monday morning the town was occupied.

The Union army entered the battle with 43,400 men; of those, 92 officers and 1,441 men were killed; 384 officers and 6,861 men were wounded, and almost 3,000 were taken prisoner.

The Rebel army was much larger and Rosecrans estimated its size at over sixty-two thousand men; the losses on that side were also very large.

Let us now see what part the 15th played in this battle.

The Regiment left Nashville on 26 December, 1862, the second day of Christmas, as already mentioned. They marched ahead of the Cumberland Army [Army of the Cumberland] and took part in general troop movements towards Murfreesboro. Around one o'clock in the

afternoon, the brigade's advance guard came upon the enemy's advance guard near Nolensville, and here the brigade was drawn up into the battle line and advanced through a small dense woods to an open field and drove the enemy to Knob Gap, where the enemy put up a determined resistance with eight pieces of artillery and the support of a large force of dismounted cavalry. But they advanced over a mile without hesitating, right up to the actual mouths of the cannon under a terrible hail of fire. They drove the enemy from his strong position and took one cannon and six prisoners. The 15th captured the cannon with a storm of bayonets, so the enemy didn't even have time to spike the cannon or make it unusable in some other way.

The following day they marched a short distance towards Triune and camped near the road until the 29th; then they marched from there towards Murfreesboro, continuing the march until the troops bivouacked in the evening without lighting a fire, resting on their weapons.

The next morning they advanced in battle formation, with Company E as the vanguard under Lieutenant Colonel McKee.

Around dinnertime this vanguard came upon the enemy's vanguard and the Battle of Stones River had begun. Company E of the 15th was therefore the first in the line of fire.

Around two o'clock in the afternoon the Regiment was ordered to advance, and it tried to keep to the woods, which was held at that point by the vanguard. Under a terrible bombardment of shells and bullets, they forced their way through a dark cedar woods without firing until the enemy was discovered behind a fence where he had taken up his position. By advancing a little further they received fire along the whole line from a battery on the left, and without support, as they were, they had to retreat a short distance, but they took up their position again three hundred yards from the enemy, whom they held back until evening; they then withdrew twelve hundred feet and rested on their weapons without lighting a fire.

Around four o'clock in the morning, the 31st, they stood again in battle lines, now supporting a battery; but when the cannon were removed, they took up their position together with the rest of the brigade and were attacked fiercely by a much larger enemy force. They withstood all the attacks in the front, but the enemy was lucky enough to flank the brigade,

which was thereby forced to withdraw. The 15th, which was last to leave the field, withdrew slowly along the railroad tracks and stayed in this vicinity for the entire day. During the first and second of January, they were stationed near the Murfreesboro highway, engaged in skirmishes with the enemy, and took some prisoners. The men remained under arms the whole day and also the entire night of the first, when they again pursued the enemy.

After having crossed Stones River they took up a position on a rise in front of the enemy, almost one mile from the river, and held this position until the morning of the fourth, without shelter or fire, in a pouring rain, constantly in skirmishes with the enemy's outposts.

For five days and nights the Regiment was constantly under arms, on short rations, and without fires. Finally, after 15 had been killed, 70 wounded and 34 taken prisoner or left behind where they were not found again, they made camp two miles from Murfreesboro.

The result of this battle was of great importance for the country. Shortly before this, Burnside had suffered a terrible defeat at Fredericksburg, Sherman at Vicksburg, and Grant had been forced to give up his march to the Mississippi River; and he was now returning with his army to Corinth, where he had started.

In the middle of this series of losses and defeats, the victory at Murfreesboro provided a light that now gave new hope. This victory was a turning point in the war.

The letters from President Lincoln and General Halleck to General Rosecrans after receiving word of the battle's outcome show how highly they valued this result; the day before this battle was one of the very darkest in the country's history, so the highest commanders heaved a sigh of relief when the good news arrived.

During this campaign Colonel Heg received the following communication:

Headquarters for the 2nd brigade, 1st Division, right flank, 28 December 1862.

The commanding colonel wishes to express his admiration of their conduct to the officers and men of the 21st Illinois Volunteers, the 15th Wisconsin Volunteers, the 10th Ohio Volunteers, and the 2nd Minnesota Battery during the engagement with the enemy near Nolensville on 26 December.

After an exhausting 10 mile march in heavy rain on an uneven, flooded road, you met the enemy and drove him ahead of you to Knob Gap, where he put up strong resistance supported by eight pieces of artillery and a large force of cavalry. It was in the attack on this battery that you demonstrated your courage, which has never been exceeded and scarcely matched in the annals of the war. After having advanced over one mile in heavy fire right up to the mouths of the cannon without stopping or hesitating, you drove the enemy away from his strong position, captured one cannon and six prisoners, and were willing, in spite of the hard march, to continue the pursuit if you had received permission.

Your conduct has awakened the admiration of the army.

Let us all be inspired by the same high principle that motivated that young patriotic soldier, Edwin Ross of Company H, 38th Illinois Volunteers, and conduct ourselves accordingly; even though he was near death, he called out to his brigade commander, "I have tried to do my duty. I came here to fight and would have gone wherever you ordered me."

W. P. Carlin
Colonel of the 38th Illinois Volunteers

To Colonel Hans Heg
15th Wisconsin Volunteers

Another communication was received later:

Headquarters, 2nd brigade, 1st Division, 27 January 1863.

The commanding colonel wishes to set forth for the officers and men of this brigade some of the instances of the heroic bravery which they displayed during this very eventful campaign, which began on 26 December 1862 and ended on 4 January 1863.

According to a precise summary of the whole army's losses, it is clear that the 21st Illinois Volunteers suffered more killed and wounded than any other regiment in this

army, yes, lost more than many brigades of the same size; it had more wounded than many larger divisions who have claimed that they saved the army and the country.

The 38th Illinois Volunteers suffered a greater loss than any other regiment in the whole army outside of this brigade, with the exception of the 36th Illinois Volunteers.

The number of killed and wounded officers and soldiers in the 101st Ohio and 15th Wisconsin was larger relative to their size than in any other outside this brigade.

The number killed in this brigade, both officers and enlisted men, is much greater than in any other brigade with the same number of regiments.

Not a single regimental banner was lost; they were carried safely, flying proudly right in the face of an overwhelming enemy force.

Not a cannon, not a caisson was lost from our battery; you held your position and fought until those troops standing on our right had fallen back, and you were attacked in the flank and the rear, while our left was also exposed. You again re-formed yourselves by a fence near the position you had held so long, and did not yield until you were almost completely surrounded.

After now having crossed two open fields, you again formed a battle line by a fence on the east side of Goersom's house (our hospital) and now held our position until you received orders to retreat.

This you did with calm and deliberation until we reached Cedar Grove, near the Nashville Pike, where you halted and sent a destructive salvo in amongst the enemy.

On 31 December you fought until half of your officers and soldiers were killed or wounded, or completely separated from their banners.

On 2 January, when we feared defeat on the left flank, on the other side of Stones River, the immortal Rosecrans sent word to your commander and gave him the following orders:

"Take your unit over to the left flank, line it up in two lines and, if our troops are driven back, let them pass through your lines and, when the Rebels come close, yell a strong hurrah and attack them!"

With the intense fighting the brigade was then reduced from nineteen hundred men to seven hundred men; nevertheless, with determined steps you approached the scene of battle, where you found that in the meantime the enemy had been defeated.

You can be proud of the indisputable honor of having attacked the enemy on the hills by Knob Gap, where you captured two¹³ cannon and 6 prisoners.

Whether or not the praise you have earned is proclaimed in the newspapers, you have certainly won a reputation for your respective regiments and batteries which will never die; when the truth comes to light, the 2nd Brigade will be hailed and as long as you live you can be proud of your conduct at Perryville, Knob Gap, and Stones River.

On the orders of

Colonel W.P. Carlin
Sam. P. Varis
Captain and Adjutant General

While they lay in camp near Murfreesboro, the weather was wet and cold and their clothing and tents were extremely miserable. The roads so were poor that it was almost impossible to get provisions through from Nashville by road, and the railroad was destroyed. It took some time before it was repaired and in the meantime the soldiers suffered terribly from lack of shoes and socks; many who escaped injury in battle were now sick and were sent to the hospital.

Guard duty and foraging occupied most of their time so there was little rest to be had, and on 31 January the division that the 15th belonged to was sent out on an expedition to Franklin in order to be close to the cavalry if help was needed, and in order to investigate Wheeler's and Forrest's forces.

¹³Other sources mention only one, and this was taken by the 15th in a bayonet storm.

The weather was still raw and cold and the roads very muddy, so the trip was anything but pleasant, but when they heard "Forward! March!" then there was forward march without complaint. The wind and weather didn't matter, and neither did blisters on the feet.

The first night they camped at Eagleville. It rained that night, and the next day they marched eight miles, but they had to slog through mud the whole way.

The cavalry surprised an enemy cavalry camp that day and took several prisoners and a large amount of Confederate money; the troops had just been paid when the attack took place.

When camp was pitched that night, an order came from General Davis that fence wood must not be taken for kindling. This was like pouring cold water over their heads; the soldiers were wet and cold before, and this was like turning them into ice because they had no axes, and without the fences they had no fire.

But now the 38th Illinois clearly thought this was going too far; they set off for the fences and the others naturally followed their example. The officers made no effort to stop them; they certainly realized that it was quite impossible to be without fire in that wet, cold night. Besides, they probably also thought that an unjust order is no order at all, even if it comes from the top.

The commander of the 38th Illinois was arrested, but soon released.

On the morning of 2 January, the march continued to Franklin and they made camp on the south side of the town around four o'clock in the afternoon.

Rebel General Forrest had been there a few days before on his way to Fort Donnellson [Donelson]. Stragglers from his corps were still in town when the vanguard arrived, but they took to their heels without putting up any resistance.

In the evening the same order was issued about not using the fences for firewood, but now Colonel Heg became angry and, after carefully weighing the consequences of his behavior, he gave his men permission to burn all the fence wood they wanted. During the night two inches of snow fell, and the cold penetrated their bones and marrow in spite of the fires.

Franklin had now changed sadly since the last time they had been there—now five months ago. At that time the town was occupied by Union troops and it seemed to flourish; now no shops were open and many houses stood abandoned. Everything looked simply terrible.

On the 12th they departed again to march back to Murfreesboro, where they arrived on the evening of the 13th and returned to their old camp.

On this expedition they had had neither tents nor baggage with them, and this was like coming home. They could now get a clean change of clothes and sleep in a tent; if this was bad, it was still better than the grey night sky dripping with rain.

As usual, time was now occupied with guard duty and foraging, until 6 March. Then Colonel Heg's brigade was sent out on an expedition to Shelbyville.

From Murfreesboro there are two roads to this town; they run almost parallel at a distance of one or two miles from each other. One is the regular highway; the other is called the mud road.

Heg first followed the mud road for 10 miles, but then shifted over to the highway. Before he got that far he gave the brigade orders to halt, whereupon he himself and some men took a detour through the woods and brush with the intention of capturing the sentries that the Rebels had stationed along the road.

Heg and two orderlies rode some distance in front of the rest of the brigade and suddenly discovered two Rebel vedettes, one sitting on the ground, the other on his horse.[#]

Neither of the orderlies was armed and Heg had only his sword, but when he was just about to be discovered, if he waited, he decided to attempt to capture these two Rebels immediately, drew his sword, and with his two unarmed orderlies went straight towards them.

The attack came so suddenly that these two Rebels surrendered immediately.

[#] Translator's note: A *vedette* is "a mounted sentry placed in advance of the outposts of an army to observe the movements of the enemy." (*The Oxford Universal Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. "vedette.")

Heg waited now until the rest of the brigade arrived, and when he found out the reserve guards' position from the prisoners, he sent a small squad after them at a quick march.

The day was cold and it rained as was usual now. The Rebels were sitting and warming themselves near a fire when they were attacked, but then they fled in all possible directions, leaving behind 10 horses, 10 guns and one prisoner.

The victors turned back to camp in high spirits—a more successful expedition than most.

Heg's report:

Headquarters, 2nd Brigade, 1st Division, 20th Army Corps, 7 March 1863.

Sir: I have the honor to report the following movements and undertakings of this brigade during 6 and 7 December.

Following instructions from the headquarters of the 20th Army Corps, I moved along the road toward Shelbyville around seven o'clock in the morning on the sixth, with two-days' rations and without baggage. Arrived at the Methodist church, eight miles from Murfreesboro, where I met a significant force of the enemy's cavalry, which was soon scattered by the vanguard of the 20th Illinois and the 15th Wisconsin Volunteers.

By Captain Newman's house near the tile-roofed church the enemy's cavalry dismounted and tried to hold their position, but our advance forces moved ahead confidently and drove the Rebels away from their hiding places. Falling back on their reserves, they again made a stand along the top of a high, stony crest that was overgrown with trees at a place where the road goes through a pass in the crest of the hill. It was clear that the enemy was attempting to post their artillery there; for them it was a very strong position. I doubled the strength of my outposts by detaching the 15th Wisconsin and 20th Illinois Volunteers and gave orders to take and hold the hill.

In the meantime Lieutenant Woodbery, commander of the 2nd Minnesota Battery, brought a unit of his Parrott guns and put them in position at the top of the hill. The enemy, who had failed to take the position he wanted for his artillery, now tried to place two cannon three-quarters of a mile farther back on the road and opened with fresh fire

on our lines. Woodbery answered with his Parrott guns and drove the enemy artillery to retreat.

My orders were to remain here and, if possible, open communication with Lieutenant Colonel Jones, who was commanding an expedition towards Middleton on the Shelbyville dirt road. This line of communication was opened by a small detachment of the 3rd Indiana cavalry who were ordered to accompany me as escort.

The enemy's forces consisted of cavalry who dismounted and fought as infantry.

I held my position, as stated above, until three o'clock on the morning of 7 March, when I received orders from Major General McCook, corps commander, to return to camp.

We took some cannon and killed some of the enemy's horses; there was also evidence that our artillery had worked on them with some effect.

Private Elija Milan of Company F, 21st Illinois Volunteers, was fatally wounded during the skirmish. There were no other losses.

Very respectfully your faithful servant,

Hans C. Heg
Commanding Colonel

Lieutenant T. W. Morrison
Acting Adjutant General

On the ninth they were again on the way to Franklin, but they came no farther than Triune, where they arrived around 11 o'clock on the evening of the 10th.

As they approached this spot, which was occupied by Union troops, the sentries began to shoot at them because they thought they were Rebels, and the vanguard returned fire; but only a couple of horses were wounded.

Here the soldiers spent a very uncomfortable night. It had again rained the entire afternoon, so they were wet to the skin, and there were no fences here so it was almost impossible to light a fire. In addition to these discomforts, their supply wagon had overturned

in a small river and they had to let it lie there until the next day. In the morning the sun came out and warmed up their frozen limbs, but the night had been dreadful.

On the 13th they withdrew and returned to their old camp at Murfreesboro on the 15th.

At the end of this month the brigade had quite a lively skirmish with the enemy on the Shelbyville highway. The Rebels' sentries were driven back from a strong position without difficulty because they had no artillery with them. The intention was to distract the Rebels' attention from another troop movement, and when this was done, they returned to camp.

The 15th had now been in uninterrupted active service for some time, and in April they were granted something resembling rest.

Rosecrans now inspected the division the 15th belonged to and gave this Regiment praise, complimenting it for its soldierly appearance and for valuable service during the campaign. As he rode up to the right side of the Regiment after receiving the salute, he remarked to Captain Johnson of Company A:

"What makes your men so small, Captain?" The captain didn't know.

"You don't give them enough soup; you must give them plenty of soup," continued the general, "so you can get them to grow."

The remark was characteristic of Rosecrans. He had, as someone in the army would say, "soup on the brain," and he issued specific and strict orders to feed the soldiers soup; he believed it was better than the strong coffee that the soldiers liked so much. But the soup could not replace coffee, any more than coffee could replace soup.

On 1 May the Regiment was transferred from the 2nd to the 3rd Brigade, over which Colonel Heg was installed as permanent commander, in accordance with orders from General Rosecrans.

The Regiment had been part of the 2nd Brigade since its arrival in Jacinta, Mississippi, at the end of July 1862, and although they were happy over the proof of recognition of and confidence in their colonel's ability, which was demonstrated by this order from the commanding general, they were at the same time a little sad over having to be separated from

their brothers-in-arms. The 15th had earned respect and honor among all the regiments in the brigade, and many expressions of sadness over the separation were also heard from that quarter. The 15th and the 21st Illinois stood particularly close to each other—and no wonder! They had gone side by side through Perryville, Knob Gap, and Stones River, and through many smaller engagements, and both knew that in the hour of danger they could safely depend on each other. That it was a lasting friendship is demonstrated by the following short anecdote from Colonel Ole C. Johnson's escape from imprisonment in the South.

He recounts:

While I was in East Tennessee on the way back to our army after I had escaped from the Rebels, I joined with some escaped prisoners from North Carolina, who were going in the same direction as I was.

One of them had guided several prisoners who had escaped from Donville [sic] through the mountains, until he himself now had to flee.

During our conversation he asked me which regiment I belonged to. I replied the 15th Wisconsin.

"The 15th Wisconsin," he said. "I have heard about that Regiment before." He then told me that one of the escaped prisoners he had guided was from the 21st Illinois, and that he had talked a great deal about the 15th and in the most laudatory terms emphasized its heroic fighting ability. Although I was now in the middle of these wild mountains, over a thousand miles from home, it did me a lot of good to hear that the Regiment I had the honor to belong to was well-known and respected.

When the Regiment was about to leave the 2nd Brigade, General Carlin, who had been cited for his bravery at Stones River, issued the following communiqué:

Headquarters, 2nd Brigade, 1st Division, 29 April 1863.

The brigade's commanding general expresses herewith his sadness over the fact that the interests of service have impelled General Rosecrans, who commands this unit, to transfer the 15th Wisconsin Volunteers, Colonel Heg, from this brigade.

The commanding general, as he is separated from this Regiment, sends herewith, to both officers and enlisted men, his heartfelt thanks for the honorable and soldierly way in which they have conducted themselves at all times.

In camp they were reliable and faithful in fulfilling all their duties, and on the battlefield they have had no superiors in bravery. They can be assured that they take with them the best wishes from the commanding general as well as the other regiments of this brigade.

On the orders of

Brigadier General Carlin

Sam P. Varis
Captain and Assistant Adjutant General

From this point until the campaign at Chattanooga began, the soldiers had good days. They had nothing to do now except general camp duties and some stints as outposts on the Shelbyville highway five miles away. Then they were usually out for four, five, or six days and usually allowed the Union people from the Shelbyville region inside these lines. Sometimes they came because they wanted to, sometimes out of necessity, and it was exhilarating to hear these people's Union-friendly sentiments.

On one such occasion on outpost duty, the brigade received the following circular from Colonel Heg.

Headquarters, 3rd Brigade, 1st Division, 20th Army Corps, 6 May 1863.

Circular.

The brigade's commanding colonel herewith has the honor of making public a comment received from the commanding general of the 20th Army Corps on a report from the army's inspector general from 5 May 1863, which reads as follows:

Headquarters, 20th Army Corps, 5 May 1863.

With respect as well as the best congratulations addressed to Colonel Heg, commander of the brigade on campaign today, from the commanding general of the 20th Army Corps.

This is the first field watch report from the army's headquarters in a long time in which no fault has been found with the troops of this corps on outpost duty.

On the orders of

Major General McCook

G. P. Thurston,
Assistant Adjutant General and Chief of Staff

The officers and enlisted men did their duty yesterday, and praise and honor are due them.

On the orders of

H. C. Heg
Colonel and Brigade Commander

Henry Hauff,
Lieutenant and Acting Assistant Adjutant General

(Such documents speak for themselves, and when one now, such a long time afterward, hears doubt about how capable the 15th actually was, as is the gossip now, these reports are the only certain evidence; and as far as the 15th is concerned these are, without exception of a high, noble character.)

In the middle of June, everything indicated that the army would soon receive orders to move out, and everyone made himself ready for battle. They knew Old Rosy (Rosecrans) well enough to know that when he moved out he meant business.

On the evening of the 23rd they got the order to be ready to march early the next morning. The vanguard moved out before dawn on the 24th, and they soon stumbled upon the enemy at Liberty Gap, which was defended vigorously. Rosecrans ordered an attack here in order to distract the enemy's attention while he threw a column of his army onto the