

December 1862

Thomas HART Beaton
McCain

86th Indiana
Volunteer Infantry

ALMS 4/97

86th Volunteer Infantry

Barnes, James A.; Carnahan, James R.; McCain, Thomas H.B.
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Orville S. Hamilton

In chapters of this history, in the account of the organization, the fact was mentioned that Orville S. Hamilton was commissioned as Colonel. There were those, however, as a matter of fact, who were commissioned as officers and sent to the field, who, for various reasons should never have been selected for the positions which they were not able to fill.

The story of the displacement of Colonel Hamilton in command of the regiment has never been told or printed. The special matters that led to the reliefment of Colonel Hamilton at Stone's River and placing Colonel Dick in command were then unknown and unsuspected by either. It is not believed that Colonel Hamilton up to the day of his death knew of the manner in which it was brought about.

There were a number of line officers present that morning who were not taken by surprise when the change came. There are but a very few of the number alive today who were in the secret, but the time that has elapsed since that memorable day has removed the pledge of absolute secrecy then given from the lips of the few who remain.

There was no mutiny, nor conspiracy to do a wrong, but the belief that the time to demand a change in the commandship of the regiment had crystalized into quiet

action on the part of quite a number of the officers. Every officer was fully convinced that a great battle was at hand. Bragg had been driven down from the Ohio river through Kentucky and into Tennessee, and had taken his position on ground of his own choosing to give Rosecrans battle. It did not require a great military genius to realize this fact, and that the battle would be hotly contested. Colonel Hamilton could not handle the regiment. It was believed that Colonel Dick could.

The name of the regiment and the lives of the men were at stake. But little was known of the articles of war, although all realized that care must be taken.

The plan was arranged secretly. It was decided to go to General VanCleve, who was then commanding the division of which the regiment formed a part, lay the facts before him, ask him to remove Colonel Hamilton in some way, and place Colonel Dick in command.

In conformity with these plans, before daylight of the morning of the opening of the battle, these officers quietly assembled just outside the bivouac of the regiment, and started for General VanCleve's headquarters not far distant. On the way, for some reason best known to the older heads, the youngest officer in years and as an officer, was selected to present the case to the General.

On arrival at the General's tent it was found that he was already up and dressed for the duties of the day. The sentinel at the headquarters challenged as they approached.

The countersign was given, and as they reached the tent the old General stepped out, and in his kindly manner asked the cause of the visitation.

The officer selected to speak stepped forward and began his statement, but he only succeeded in uttering the first sentence which sufficiently disclosed the purport of the visit, when he interrupted and stopped any further words by saying, "Not another word, gentlemen, not another word. You certainly do not realize the dangerous position in which you are placing yourselves. Go back to your regiment, go at once."

Crestfallen and sick at heart these officers started to return. After they had gone but a few steps an orderly came hurrying up and said the General wished to see the spokesman of the party. This officer on returning was told by the General that he would look after the interest of the regiment, that all would turn out for the best, and that he would be along the line at daylight.

At day break the entire army was formed in line of battle, and so stood in line until after daylight, when it was discovered that General VanCleve, with his Assistant Adjutant General, were coming down the line and stopping at the different regiments when some command would be given, the movement executed and then resume its position in line as before.

As it came nearer it could be better understood. The Colonel of each regiment as he was reached was directed to

give some certain command, this command being changed. The explanation of the movement was required to be given before the men were permitted to attempt the execution.

General VanCleve and the brigade commander, Colonel Fyffe, finally reached the Eighty-sixth Indiana, when he stated to Colonel Hamilton that he was testing his regiment so that he might be satisfied that the officers and men could change their formation, if it should be necessary, in action.

He then said: "Colonel, you will 'Change front forward on first company.' Give the commands. But before your regiment undertakes to execute the movement explain it fully so that there can be no mistake. Now give the command: 'Change front forward on first company.' Give the instructions as I have directed."

Colonel Hamilton gave the command as directed, but there he stopped. Then was heard the voice of the old General: "Instruct your regiment, Colonel. They are new men. Instruct them, Colonel."

Again the Colonel gave the command, "Change front forward on first company." And again he stopped, more confused than before. Again came the words of the General. "Instruct your men; instruct your men."

The third time the Colonel gave the command, but this time he was excited and confused beyond measure, and the sharp tones struck his ears: "Colonel, you must obey my orders; instruct your men how to execute the movement."

The Colonel broke down completely, called in a confused

and utterly dazed manner for the Lieutenant Colonel, and unbuckling his sword belt turned on his horse, gave the sword to the Assistant Adjutant General, dismounted, and the command of the regiment then by order of the General devolved upon the then Lieutenant Colonel Dick.

In what has been said of the Eighty-sixth Indiana regiment and its first Colonel, all intention to cast any reflection upon the bravery of honesty of purpose of Colonel Orville S. Hamilton is most emphatically disavowed. No one who knew Colonel Hamilton ever doubted either his bravery or his earnest desire to do all within his power both as a man and an officer, to make his regiment all that it should have been.

More than this, the writer, from personal intercourse with him, was led to believe, and now believes, that Colonel Hamilton was of that proud disposition that led him to wish for the very highest position for the regiment that it was possible for any body of troops to attain. The only trouble with him was that there was no military genius of any kind in his make-up. He was a man of good strong mind, and reputed to be a good lawyer, but not one particle of that strength of mind was in a military direction, His mind and memory were sufficiently strong to memorize the tactics, but he could not understand why a military command was given in a set form, nor could he realize that there was a reason for every movement in the tactics, and therefore could not put any of his memorized tactics into practical use.

He could give a command which he received, but could not call from the store house of his memory the manner of executing the command when given so as to make the manner of its execution understood by the new officers of his regiment so that they could execute, or cause to be executed, the movement for which the command had been given.

As has been stated, Colonel Hamilton was a brave man, and all soldiers agree that bravery in an officer in the face of the enemy covers a multitude of shortcomings.

At the battle of Perryville, alone in command of his regiment, in so far as the other field officers of the regiment were concerned, himself a new officer wholly without experience, and with a regiment in which both officers and men as a whole were equally ignorant of their duties, and the manner in which those duties were to be performed; yet he never for an instant faltered in his efforts to do all he could, and for the sake of his regiment did not hesitate to ask assistance, even from one who did not hold a commission, in the formation of his line of battle, and then waited as calmly as the most perfect tactician and veteran, for the "shock of battle" which all believed was to come.

Afterward at the battle of Stone's River, when he had been relieved from the command of his regiment, not because of any violation or orders, nor yet because of any attempt to shirk his duty, for he was in his place ready to do to the extent of his ability, but relieved because he could not by reason of his non-military mind apply military principles to

the absolute needs of the occasion.

But when relieved and entirely free to withdraw from the terrible battle that was then opening, and which so soon afterward struck his regiment with such terrible and deadly effect, instead of leaving the field, dismounted from his horse, sent the horse to the rear, and then securing a gun and cartridge box took a place with the men of his regiment and remained through the whole of the battle doing duty in the ranks as though he were an enlisted man.

It is due to the honor of Colonel Hamilton, it is due to the honor and magnificent record of the Eighty-sixth Regiment of Indiana in the War of the Rebellion, that the bravery of Colonel Orville S. Hamilton should be chronicled with the history of the regiment.

The fault should not be laid at his door that he was not a military man by nature, and he should not be censured because he could not become a military commander. The days of our battles are over, many, very many of our comrades sleep the soldiers' sleep on the fields they helped to make glorious, many more of them have answered the "last roll call" since "white winged peace" has come to our land, and we who write, and they who shall read what is written, should ever give the credit which is due to every soldier who stood with us in those troublous and stormy days. Colonel Hamilton sleeps peacefully now in

- "that low green tent

Whose curtain never outward swings."

And let us all say, as we can truthfully say, he was a brave,
courageous, and patriotic man.

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Incidents from 30th Regiment, Indiana Volunteers
Page 151-2 Indiana's Roll of Honor, Volume II

Corporal William Rosbrough, of Company B, one of the color guard, at the battle of Stone's river, was shot through the breast and fell. His comrade, in the rear rank, stepped promptly into his place. Rosbrough crawled out of the line. As his comrade raised his gun a rebel bullet struck the barrel, bending it, and rendering the gun useless. Rosbrough seeing this, and very much exhausted, said, "Here is my gun; there's a load in it, but no cap," at the same time shoving it along the ground. His comrade caught up the gun, capped it, fired, and, casting his eye towards Rosbrough, saw that he was lying in a uncomfortable position. Placing his hand on Rosbrough's head, he discovered that he was dead. A few moments after, a soldier, searching his cartridge box for ammunition, found but one cartridge. Rosbrough had fired thirty-eight rounds!

Dec 1862 Indiana's Roll of Honor

Private Twomey, of Company A, 30th Regiment, was a good representative of the Irish race. Brave to rashness, he never looked for consequences, but "went for the cursed ribbles" whenever there was a chance. During the battle of Stone's river, there was a point in our lines opposite which the enemy's works were formed at almost right angles. One day a rebel officer was seen riding along the line, and advancing beyond the intersection of their lines. Twomey and a comrade noticed it, and concluded to "go for him." One was to fire at the man, the other at the horse. Both fired. Horse and rider fell.

Twomey started like a deer for the officer. His comrade's courage failed. Over the four hundred yards in front Twomey ran with great speed. The rebels were puzzled by the strange movement. Reaching the horse, Twomey fell flat alongside, pulled a water-proof overcoat from the dead officer, took a watch from his pocket, and a flask of whiskey from his saddle bags.

Springing suddenly up, he ran swiftly toward the Union lines, reaching them without a wound, although a heavy volley was fired at him. Twomey was afterwards accidentally shot by a comrade, and disabled for life.

Private McMann, of Company A, was another Irish genius. Soon after he joined the Thirtieth, a charge was made by the regiment on the enemy's works. The assault was peculiarly dangerous, and the old soldiers screened themselves much as possible, taking advantage of the protection the ground afforded.

McMann rushed on, paying no attention to cover or danger, and was the first man to enter the rebel works, using his gun as a shillalah, and making a terrible noise. After the fight was over, his clothes were found pierced with bullets, but he was not wounded. The old soldiers cautioned him about exposing himself so recklessly, and told him how to accomplish his objective without so much exposure. Mac's answer, after hearing their counsel, was, "And now, will some iv yees be afther telling a poor divil how to kill ribbles and watch stumps at the same time."

pass is good. Beautiful farms are seen in every direction. We advance to within about 4 miles of Murfreesboro where we go in camp. Thousands and thousands of camp fires are lighting up and shedding a halo which magically adorn the earth. Perhaps by morning the ball will be opened and one of the bloodiest battles of the war will be the result.

©Tuesday ©December ©30 ©1862

The morning dawns and with it is heard heavy picket firing in front. Rained during the night and the day is a cool and cloudy one. Soon we are drawn in line of battle not knowing when we will be in the thickest of the fight. Both on our right and left as far as the eye can search are seen long lines of men with bayonets glittering in the air ready for the approaching conflict. Gen. Rosecrans visited our regiment and reviewed the men. Waited patiently all day but as yet I have learned nothing particular of the heavy firing on the right. Encamped on the same ground. It is expected that by tomorrow the ball will be opened. May God in his mercy avert the coming storm. Into his hands I commit myself. Penciled in here is "Battle of Stones River or Murfreesboro p-530."

©Wednesday ©Dec ©31 ©1862

The wind was heavy last night. Flying clouds in the morning. The ball is opened on our right wing. The distant roar of artillery and musketry sounds like the rumbling of distant thunder. An order is read by Col. Fife from Gen. Rosecrans in which the General praises the men very highly for the conduct in yesterday's fight together cautioning the men to fire low and stand like men. It seems that our brigade was ordered on the extreme left. We marched perhaps a mile in that direction when the order was countermanded and we were turned toward the rear as it was said that the rebel cavalry were cutting off our train. In fact they had captured the train. We started back on "double quick" to intercept them. On the way knapsacks, blankets, coffee pots and other things not really necessary on the battlefield were thrown in every direction. We formed in line of battle in a cornfield after having "double quicked" about two miles. Our cavalry were in front who fired upon them two or three rounds which took effect & we had the pleasure of witnessing the "reb" scatter. They left us in possession of the train which they had captured a few moments before. We were then ordered to take our original position on the right center. The enemy were making heavy inroads on McCook's Corps they slowly massed their whole force on our right. Back we "double quicked" in line of battle over stones and through cedar thickets to support McCook who was rapidly falling back hotly pursued by the enemy. We marched out through an open field. Occasional shots from the woods revealed to us that the enemy was near. Slowly advanced during the time had orders to fall down several times. We succeeded in getting to the fence which enclosed the field. We were ordered to "fall down". "Fire"

Dec 31, 1862

~~Col. Hamilton story~~

~~It was while at Rural Hill on the 17th (of November) that Lt. Col. George F. Dick joined the regiment.~~

The Battle of Stone's River - Epilogue, page 106
The "Tour of the Confederacy"

Four months before the battle, the Eighty-sixth had entered the field with a thousand men. Disability, disease and death had decimated its ranks until that morning it numbered 368, including officers. The aggregate loss on that bloody day was 194, ten more than half. When the roll was called on New Year's morning, 1863, but one hundred and seventy-four officers and men answered to their names. Ninety-nine men and two officers were captured.

The prisoners were marched double-quick in the direction of Murfreesboro. Upon arriving in the city they were placed in the court house yard surrounded with a stone fence. Having been relieved of their ponchos, blankets and overcoats by rebel officers who had quarters in the court house, and with neither fire nor food, there was much suffering from cold and hunger.

They were moved to a schoolhouse lot and there provided with flour, which was mixed with water to make a dough which was wound around sticks and held before the fire to bake.

The next morning they were loaded aboard platform cars headed toward Chattanooga. Exposed and cold, without protection of blankets or ponchos, they suffered much, especially when it began to rain. Arriving in Chattanooga they were marched to the banks of the Tennessee River under the shadow of Lookout Mountain.

The next day they were provided with axes to cut down trees for firewood. They went without food until evening, when they were provided with corn meal, sugar and metal skillets to bake it in. At 3 a.m. lines were formed and they started for the Atlanta depot in box cars meant for freight and cattle, packed so close they could neither sit nor stand with any comfort.

From Atlanta they were taken to West Point, to Montgomery, Alabama and back to Atlanta. They were loaded again and taken to Dalton, Georgia, then to Knoxville, Tennessee. From there they were taken to Richmond, Virginia and Libby Prison.

The days were passed getting acquainted with fleas, having prayer meetings, reading and re-reading any scrap of paper.

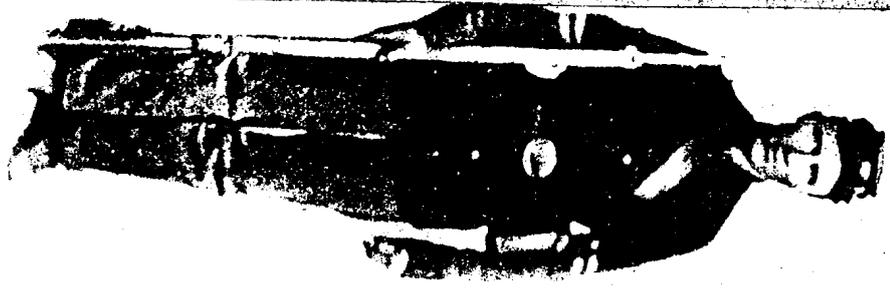
The enlisted men were taken to City Point to be paroled. They were kept in a parole camp and then transferred to Camp Chase, near Columbus, Ohio, After two weeks they were taken to Camp Carrington in Indianapolis and given eight days furlough.

was the next command which was executed with promptness. A volley of musketry from the enemy came rattling like hail which greatly reduced our ranks. By this time they were flanking us both on the right and left, being exposed to a heavy crossfire the brigade was ordered to retreat. I did not hear the order and consequently was considerably in the rear when I observed that the regiment were falling back. They fled precipitately and seemed perfectly panic stricken. In short they ran like a flock of scared sheep. I ran after them until completely exhausted when I fell in a fence corner thinking perhaps that here I might find a shield from the volleys of musketry from the enemy. Nearly every step I took across that field I saw a man, a comrade, fall near me. An exclamation of "Oh! I'm killed" and all would be over with those who had come in contact with the fatal shot. Many were wounded whose sufferings were intense. Their groans and shrieks are still ringing in my ears. Such a scene I never before witnessed I hope never again to witness a similar one. I can only attribute my escape to the intervening mercy of the Almighty God who answered not only my own prayer but the prayer of friends at home. The enemy advanced and I was taken as a prisoner of war. I was taken back over the battlefield which extended about three miles. Taken to Murfreesboro. Passed over the field where the dead lay strewn everywhere. To say which side lost the most I could not but as near as I could judge I supposed the number to be equal. I conversed with Confederate officers who told me that they had been upon the fields of Bull Run and Shiloh but they had never seen the equal number slain before. Night closed the bloody contest. As yet I do not know the true result - but - I have fears that we have not been successful. Whether the fight will be renewed tomorrow or not I do not know. About 2700 prisoners were taken during the day who were placed in the Murfreesboro Court Yard, without fire, without anything to eat. Thus the old year closed! It closed witnessing one of the bloodiest battles of the war! I trust the year 1863 will close in peace. Penciled in, "Taken prisoner - Stones River."

©1863

©Thursday ©January ©1st ©1863
"Happy New Year!" No, did I say "happy new year?" I only quoted the greeting of loved ones at home. Another year is begun. The morning dawns finding me in the Murfreesboro Court Yard having passed a very uncomfortable night - having passed it without fire and with but one blanket though many of the men had none. About 5 o'clock we are taken out and put in an old mill. Here it is no better as we are not allowed fire. All day long we remained there with nothing to eat. Wearily the hours passed by awaiting either to draw rations or leave. Sundown came and we were removed to an old school house lot to encamp for the night. Here we are as thick as bees some without blankets or overcoats and all

1862



Wm. B. ...

1861



1860



86th Indiana Regimental Association



W' HEROES:

On the 1st day of May A.D. 1898 taps sounded and lights were put out for Comrade

T. H. McCain

formerly a member of Company I who pitched his tent on the Eternal Camping Ground, and

- **Whereas:** The muffled drum's sad roll has beat the soldier's last tattoo;
No more on life's parade shall meet the brave and fallen few;
On fame's Eternal Camping Ground his silent tent is spread
While Glory guards with solemn round the bivouac of the dead.

- **Whereas:** Comrade McCain was a brave and loyal soldier, a worthy, upright and honest citizen, and loving husband. Therefore be it

- **Resolved:** That the 86th Indiana Regimental Association, in the death of Comrade McCain mourns the loss of one who stood beside his Comrades in the hour of danger, and one who in all the walks of his life was worthy of our highest respect and emulation.

Resolved: That we tender to his relatives who are left behind our sincere sympathy in this hour of their bereavement.

Resolved: That the colors of this Association be draped in mourning for a period of thirty days in memory of our departed Comrade, and that a copy of these resolutions be presented to the family.

M. Hursch

P. Anderson

Committee

J. A. Dick
President

P. Pence
Secretary