

William Howell's account of the battle of Murfreesboro

Member of the 25th Alabama Infantry regiment, Company I

General Bragg having evacuated Kentucky, the Federal troops under command of General Rosecrans had been concentrated about Nashville and Bragg's army around Murfreesboro. Only about 25 miles lay between the two armies. So about the last of December Rosecrans advanced on Murfreesboro sufficiently near to offer battle. So on the morning of 31st December we accepted the challenge and at them we went. The enemy were posted in line of battle on the opposite side of a plantation from us some 800 yards and we advanced on them through the open field under heavy artillery fire as well as musketry and our loss was very heavy in going through the field. Four men, Sid Phillips, Gus Pool, Charly Roper and Jack Ezzell of Company "I" were killed out right. Lieutenant Archibald Patterson of Company "H" was also killed and every company of the regiment met a similar fate, in killed and wounded.

Our line, in the face of their concentrated fire, got within fifty yards of their battery when our line gave way and stampeded back through the field and we suffered worse than while advancing.

Among the killed in that unfortunate stampede was Major Costello who had just been promoted from the Captaincy of Company "K". It looked for a time that all was lost and we had some difficulty in rallying the men and reforming the line of another attack.

I remember just at this critical moment General Frank Cheatham, Major General of Tennessee troops came rushing to our aid. Made such a stiring [sic] appeal to the men, that our line was soon formed and in the face of another galling fire we charged on them again and so determined were the men that we rushed upon them and captured their battery and drove back the whole line, but they soon reformed their lines and for the live long day we fought over an area of two or three miles and at night fall we had driven them off the field.

Our regiment was led in this fight by Lt. Colonel George D. Johnston who displayed great courage and leadership and won the high esteem and love of the officers and men of the line. At night fall, when the firing ceased he was the only field officer with the regiment.

Our loss in killed and wounded was very heavy. Lt. Scofield of Company "C" from Columbiana was among the killed. I remember during the fight, of coming across his body just after he had fallen, he having been shot dead and I stopped long enough to take a plain gold ring from his finger and his pocket knife and pocket book and preserved them till after the battle and sent them home to his family.

I think I went in that morning with about 40 guns in Company "I" and when the battle closed that night there was only one man Pvt. Bob Clark and myself with the regiment. Most of the others had been either killed, wounded or captured

Our loss was so heavy, that we did not renew the fight next morning. Although we had the previous day, driven the enemy from every position he had taken, we held the battlefield for two days and the enemy made but one attack on a part of our line and was repulsed.

So about the third night after the battle General Bragg withdrew his army and we fell back to Shelbyville, Tennessee where we went into winter quarters and remained there till June 1863. During that spring we had the longest rest we had enjoyed since the war began.