



GARRET LAREW
CIVIL WAR SOLDIER
Photograph taken 1863

86-91

Pioneer
Brigade

GARRET LAREW CIVIL WAR SOLDIER

With an Account of His Ancestors
and of His Descendants

by
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roster of the 86th Infantry for over a year and a half more, he never actually served with the 86th again. The pioneers were assembled as a brigade at Nashville for instruction; each battalion was made up of 10 to 12 companies of 80 to 100 men each--a given battalion being formed from men drawn from a given "grand division" within the 14th Army Corps. The Pioneer Brigade henceforth moved with the Corps, repairing and constructing roads, bridges, and pontoon bridges, erecting forts, and doing other similar tasks--very important work, as we shall see, and the formation of this Brigade added much to the credit of General ("Rosey") Rosecrans.

Garret missed out on a lot of action as a result of his detachment from his regiment. The 86th Infantry, now in the 2nd Brigade, 3rd Division, 21st "Corps," went on to lose half of its personnel--and its colors--at the Battle of Stone's River on December 31, 1862. (Garret and his fellow pioneers also took part in that battle, as we shall soon see.) Of the almost 1,000 men who made up the 86th Infantry in August, only 368 remained by the morning of December 31st; this was the result of disease, wounds, and death over the months. But on that last day of the year, the regiment lost 194 out of those remaining 368--two of them from Garret's former company--including 41 killed, approximately 52 wounded, and 101 captured. The regiment was down to 174 men as of New Year's Day, 1863.

Despite these losses, the 86th went on to new trials of disease and battle. It served in the Chickamauga campaign and saw more heavy fighting at Chattanooga in November 1863; there the 86th and the 79th Indiana were the first units to break orders and charge up Missionary Ridge, gaining a notable victory. The 86th went on to Atlanta with Sherman in May-September 1864, but it missed out on the March to the Sea; instead, it was part of the army which protected Tennessee from the Rebels during Sherman's march. As such, the regiment took part in the Battle of Nashville in December 1864. The 86th ended its career in Tennessee, mustering out on June 6, 1865. Of the 41 officers and 917 enlisted men of the regiment, the war took away 3 officers and 238 men by death, while 48 deserted. Company K had 92 men originally; of these, 12 died, 3 deserted, and one was never accounted for. Garret had indeed missed an epic adventure by transferring to the pioneers, but he very likely saved his life.

Garret did not miss out on all of the fighting. He was no sooner called to the pioneer brigade than the

pioneers were called upon to fight. It was December 1862; the war in the east was going miserably. Hopes raised by the gory victory at Antietam in September were dashed by the debacle at Fredericksburg in December. The British Parliament was to meet in January 1863, and Lincoln feared that England might be tempted to intervene in the American war, presumably by offering mediation. The Emancipation Proclamation helped to ward off such a move by tying the Union cause to anti-slavery sentiment in England as well as at home; on the other hand, many who were fighting for the Union were alienated by the Proclamation, partly because they were not abolitionists, and partly because it vitiated hopes for a negotiated settlement. Many in southern Indiana felt this way.

Lincoln wanted action at the front to bolster United States prestige; what he got in the east was Burnside's dismal "mud-march" in January 1863. In the west, the President's continuing obsession with eastern Tennessee caused him to urge Rosecrans onwards against Bragg. Eastern Tennessee was filled with potential Union sympathizers, and it was also an important center of communications and raw resources for the Confederacy. The area contained 2/3 of the South's niter beds--used in the making of gunpowder--as well as copper, lead, and some of the South's most extensive munitions factories. By late 1862, the Confederacy had already lost western and part of central Tennessee--and with those areas went some important pork and corn production, along with the South's biggest iron producing centers. The Southern Government had invested too much in trying to hold the Mississippi area, to the neglect of Tennessee where public support for the Rebel cause was slight; thus Rosecrans was now threatening to deprive the South of eastern Tennessee as well. Bragg could not allow this without a fight, and the result was the Battle of Stone's River, otherwise called the Battle of Murfreesboro, from December 30, 1862 to January 3, 1863, in the area near Nashville.

On December 29th and 30th, Garret and his fellow pioneers prepared the banks of Stone's River for fording at three places, and then stood guard at the lower ford. The opposing armies both went over to the attack on December 31st; a gap developed in the Federal line, forcing a general withdrawal of the Union right--this was the hottest phase of the battle. The Brigade of Pioneers meanwhile had been building fortified bridges from Nashville to Stone's River, including an 80 foot temporary bridge over Stone's River which they completed

in one night. On December 31st, the Brigade, 1700 strong, was ordered into the line during the emergency. The Pioneers were placed between Rousseau's Division and Van Cleve's Division. The artillery battery of the Chicago Board of Trade was closely associated with the Pioneer Brigade; together, they repulsed three Confederate attacks on December 31st. Garret did not have a diary to keep during this battle, even if he had had the time to write; exactly one year later, however, he records:

(31 December 1863) This day one year ago we lay in line of battle all day and night and part of our brigade was in two or three brisk little skirmishes as the rebels tried to capture our battery but did not make the trip.

Garret's entry makes it all seem a bit easier than most accounts would have us believe; perhaps he was in a comparatively quiet part of the line. On New Year's Day, 1863, Captain (later Brigadier General) James St. Clair Morton led the Pioneer Brigade as it fought off another attack; on the 2nd, the Pioneers advanced gallantly to the support of Van Cleve's Division. During the battle as a whole, the Pioneer Brigade lost 15 enlisted men killed, 29 enlisted men wounded, and 4 officers wounded.

A curious footnote to this episode in Garret's career may be mentioned here. During the effort to save the Union center, the Pioneer Brigade (among others) was called upon to support Colonel Shepherd's Regular Army Brigade, a part of Rousseau's Division. This brigade, as the name suggests, was made up of members of the United States Regular Army rather than volunteers or draftees from the states. The Regulars suffered the heaviest blows of all during Bragg's offensive on December 31st. There was a young officer in the Regulars, a member of the 2nd Battalion, 18th U. S. Infantry Regiment, named Frederick Phisterer. He was an immigrant from Würtemberg, Germany, who had served as an enlisted man in the U. S. Army before the Civil War. He joined the 18th Infantry in November 1861 and saw action at Perryville. During the Battle of Stone's River, he earned the Congressional Medal of Honor. Later, in November 1863, he was in the charge up Missionary Ridge.

After the War, Captain Phisterer saw service on the Indian frontier as the adjutant of Colonel Carrington's regiment, the unit which suffered the "Fetterman Massacre"--although Phisterer had left Carrington's regiment before then. While on the frontier, one of his baby sons,

Karl Joseph Phisterer, was temporarily kidnapped by an Indian squaw. After leaving the Regular Army, Frederick Phisterer had a distinguished career in the New York National Guard, where he wrote the monumental statistical work New York in the War of the Rebellion, among other works of statistics and regulations. He became known as the "Father of the New York National Guard," and is still remembered among Civil War buffs for his statistical research. When he ended his career, he was a brevet major general.

Frederick Phisterer and Garret Larew almost certainly did not know each other, coming as they did from different states and serving in different units; however, on January 15, 1864, Garret records that he went looking for someone he knew in the 18th U. S. Infantry. During the Battle of Stone's River, Garret and Frederick must have been within a very short distance of each other. Years later, in 1930, Karl J. Phisterer's daughter, Catherine Willard Phisterer, married Lieutenant (later Brigadier General) Walter B. Larew, son of Garret Abraham Larew, who in turn was the son of our Civil War Garret Larew. The younger son of Walter and Catherine was named after both of his grandfathers, that is, Karl Garret Larew, the author of this volume.

To return to the battlefield at Stone's River: on New Year's eve, the Pioneers lay on their arms all night; no fires were allowed, and the men did not even enjoy the use of their blankets. On New Year's Day, 1863, Garret's diary resumes:

Lay in line of battle all day without anything to eat. Was relieved of the advance about ten o'clock at night and marched to the rear and camped for remainder of the night.

(2 January) Was drawn up in line early in the morning again and lay untill about four o'clock. The rebels attacked our advance and we was ordered forward to their support and drove the enemy. . . .

(3 January) Worked on fortifications all day. Tore down a good dwelling house to get the rock and brick for breast works. I hear heavy firing of cannon off to our right.

The Confederates withdrew on the night of January 3rd-4th. Tactically speaking, the battle had been a Rebel success, but Bragg did not have enough forces available to destroy Rosecran's army--which was, in fact,