"The War Memoirs of Captain John W. Lavender, CSA. They Never Came Back; the story of Co F. Fourth Ark Infantry, CSA Originally known as the Montgomery Hunters, as Told by Their Commanding Officer."

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CHAPTER 9

BATTLE OF MURFRESBORO

We was moved up nearer the Town and began Preparing to meet the Enemy which was massing in considerable force near by between Nashville and Murfresboro. On the 29th it rained and Turned much colder. Late in the afternoon we was moved forward and had to wade Stone River, a small stream 50 or 60 feet wide and about waste Deep and just aboute as cold as Ice. Marched up in a large Field that had been cultivated in corn, there formed a line of Battle. By this time it was geting Dark. We had no wood to make fires. We was wet and a cold north wind Blowing, no shelter of timber or any thing Else.

Things seemed Desperate. A lot of the men struck out in Search of wood. They finally returned with a lot of old Fence Rails which we cut up and made small Fires as we had orders to make but Little fire as it might attract the Enemy and cause them to Shell our Lines. We could not Lay down as the ground was wet and muddy and we was

very short of Blankets. So we put in a fearful night. The next day was a dark cloudy Driselly day very bad. We remained in line there all day and the next night but got more wood and had more fire During the day and was Dryed out to some Extent, but aboute midnight was called up in line and advanced aboute one hundred and Fifty yards to a narrow Strip of woods and Brush that run through the field and formed a line and ordered to sit or lay down on our arms, make no light or nois. By this time it had cleared up and it was a cold Starlight night.

In the meantime the Enemy had moved up in the woods just out side of the field, not over three or four hundred yards of where we was, stoped and formed a line of Battle. Just before day they built up small fires, seemed not to know how near we was to them. Just as day began to show in the East we was called up and ordered to leave all Bagage Except haversacks, canteens and Prepare for Battle in Quick time. In five minutes we was ready. Just at this time the Comisary with some men come along the line and give Each Company Whiskey Enouf to give Each man a good drink which was thankfully received as we was very cold

and chilly having had no fire and short on Blankets.

A Skirmish line was deployed out aboute Fifty Steps in advance of the line. Orders was give to advance with as little noise as Possable and not to fire a Gun until ordered. The Pickets was not to Fire. The Idea was to get Just as close to them as Possable before they knew it. We advanced in Quick time and soon struck their Pickets. They fired on our Pickets but ours did not Return the Fire but kept advancing, was but a few yards in advance of our line. We was geting near the woods, saw a Rail Fence at the Edge of the wood, was ordered to hold our Fire until we got to the Fence. A heavy Picket line was Fireing, so heavy that our Pickets fell Back into our Line of Battle. When in about Seventy Five yards of the Fence the Enemy just out side the fence not more than fifty yards it was hard to make the men hold their Fire.

Every Company officer was in Front of his men urging them to hold their fire. The last order I gave my Company was keep cool and aim low. At that time we struck the Fence and Fired a deadly volley at the Enemy not over fifty or seventy Five steps. The Line seemed to strike the Fence at the same time and knocked it Flat to the Ground,

raiised a yell and charged the Feds like a storm takeing them completely by Surprise, routing them completely. They was cooking their Breakfast. Their coffee pots was on the fire frying their meal, Guns in stacks. We captured Quite a lot of arms and men. We did not stop but kept advanceing.

We had struck their Extream Right. They swung around as they fell Back. As our men to our Right and near the center of our army did not Drive the Enemy but little caused their Right to swing around as we Pushed them until they massed a heavy force of Infantry and a Six Gun Field Battery behind a heavy Rail Fence in an open Field and turned such a Fire on I think it was Lidels Brigade on our Churchills Brigade right that they was checked and was suffering a heavy loss but was holding their Ground. Our Brigade was ordered to swing to the Right in double Quick time and strike the Enemy on their Right Flank. It was a perfect open field with a rail fence between us and the Enemy.

When we was in aboute three hundred yards of them they turned the Field Guns on us, also opened Fire from a line of Infantry behind the Fence. We had a heavy Body of men and was

ordered to take them Guns. We charged the Fence and Drove the Feds knocking the Fence flat to the ground. The line of Feds fell just back of their Field Guns when they left the Fence which was not over one hundred yards. They fell back slow and Fought Stubbornly. We made a Desperate charge on the Battery. It seemed to rain Grape Shot from them Guns but we went like a storm on to them. The Gunners stood their ground until we was on them. I think they was nearly all killed or wounded.

The Federal Infantry contested Every foot of Grond with us in falling back after they left the Battery which we had captured until they got in the woods, then they ceased Firing and fell Back near a half mile where they made another stand.

All this time the entire army to our Right was fighting Desperately and had turned the Federal left and they was falling Back and massing their men along the Railroad Imbankment. In the meantime our lines was got in order and advanced through a cedar woods one 1/2 mile to a heavy Rail Fence inside of which was a Dence Cedar Brake which we made our way through for about two hundred yards to an open field. The Rail

oad Bank was aboute 75 to 100 yards out in the eld. As our Pickets advanced they Fired Just nouf to Draw us out as our Pickets stopped at e Edge of the open Ground. Just as we Emerged om the Brush we Discovered them behind the R Bank and was ordered to charge them. It eemed that the Hole R R Bank Exploded and uch a storm of Grape Shot and Bullets I have ever before or since seen or heard. They had all e Guns they had massed along the R R Bank nd a Blind of Cedar Brush to hide them and all e Infantry that could be brought to bear on us nd all that our men could do was to fall back in ouble Quick in Broken Ranks. No army living ould withstand such a storm of Shot and Bullets ough our lines got in from 40 to 60 yards of the uns.

We retreated Back in the Cedar Brake in hich there was a great many Sinks in the ground nd Rocks that made good Shelter. So a great nany men Lay down in those places until the ireing ceased to some Extent and they could get ut safe as the Enemy did not advance. We fell ack to near where we had taken the Battery and ot our men Lined up ready to meet the Enemy

should they advance. During this time the Confederates got all of their artillery in Position to bear hard on the Federal Lines that had been turned both Right and Left and massed along the R R Bank and the artilery Duell that took place there and then and nearly all our Forces of Infantry in Deadly Combat.

I cannot use language to Express the nois of this Battle. The Earth seemed to be in perfect commotion as if a heavy Earth Quake was on, mans voice could not be heard but a few feet, verbal commans was out of the Question. It seemed as if the Heavens and Earth had broke loose. This continued for about one hour when it gradually Quieted down. The Confederates failed to Dislodge the Federals but held their ground and the Entire Battlefield Except the R R Bank where they was massed.

Our Casualties was heavy as the Entire Battle was on open Ground on our Side. The First charge made in the morning our Regimental Collor Bearer was wounded and fell. Lieutenant Logan of our Company took up the Collors and carried them in the 2nd charge. Logan fell mortally wounded and died from the wound. Lieutenant Armstrong of

Co. D 4th Regt took up the Collors and carried them in the last charge after Passing through the Cedar Brake. When that fucilade of Grape and Bullets was poured into us Lieut. Armstrong was by my side with the Collors. He fell and said to me Capt. they have got me.

I at once took up the Collors. By this time our men was falling Back our Ranks Broken.[16] How I ever lived to get out and carry that Flag has always been a mistery to me. I had just Raised the collors when the staf was cut in too Just above my head. I took it up again and held on to Both Pieces and Beat a hasty Retreat into the Cedar Brake. Although the shot was flying like a shower of Hale, the limbs and Brush falling all around me, I was so exausted I walked Back. When I got to the Rail Fence at the outside of the Cedar Brake I got on top of the Fence. They had by this time to some Extent ceased Fireing Grape and small arms but was literally tareing up the woods with shells. I stoped for a minute or two and Looked Back. I saw a very tall white Eyed fellow by the name of Carroll runing high speed. He jumped at the fence and lit on top. I says to him hello Bill, what are they doing Back there. Oh, said he, they

had all the Brush cleaned up and was Brakeing up the Ground when I left. He made no halt. Said I, hold on Bill, I am going that way. Hell, said he, this is no time to wait for company.

Well I got down off the Fence and walked Back to where the officers was lining up the men. As I came up they Raised a Regular War Hoop when they saw I had the Regimental Collors. Then on Inspection I found the top of the crown of my hat gone, my canteen and haversack gone, my coat tail on one side partly gone, all done by shot, my clothes cut in several places with shot but my Flesh untouched. The Flag was shot almost to strings.

I Learned much about the Position of the Federals Some years ago or about 10 years after the war. I met and made the acquaintance of a Col. Gunther who was in command of the old arsenal here in Little Rock. He asked me if I was in the Southern Army. I told him I was. He ask me if I was at the Battle of Murfresboro. I told him I was. He then asked me if I was Capt. Lavender of the 4th Ark Inft. I told him I was. He Reached out his hand and said, I wish to shake your hand old Fellow. Well I was somewhat taken by Surprise to have a Federal Col approach me in

that most Frendly manner. He said I met you in one of the hotest Contests I Ever Experienced in all my Battles in war. I ask him how he knew he met me. He said in the Reports of all the Battles of the war on Both sides now filed in the War Department at Washington and then being Published he saw my name in the Reports of that Battle as Saveing the collors of the 4th Ark. Regiment while trying to take the Federal Batteries along the R R Bank and was cut to Peaces and forced to fall Back. He told me that he was in command of all the Federal artilery at Murfresboro that day and commanded in Person when the Desperate charge was made. He said the Confederate or Churchills Brigade Fought in that charge like Demonds, seemed to Disregard their lives.

He said if the Federals had not had all the men and Guns that could be Brought to bear on that Point and them conceiled so as the Confederates could not see them the Feds would have lost the day. He said for a short time he thought he was gone, said he poured Grape Shot in by the Peck and at such close Range he could hardly see how a man could live in Front of them. He said that was the hardest Fought Battle and more Down

Rite courage shown than in any Battle he had Ever seen Fought, where men Fought in an open Field with no Protection and he was a friend to Every man that was in that charge although they was fighting him they was Americans and he admired their courage. He then went on and told me how he had his Batterys arranged and their Infantry placed. He said we come just as he had calculated but with grater force and Determination than he Expected, but that was their last Stand and Defeat meant Stampead to them and they fought with Desperation.

Well we lay on the Battlefield that night and all the next day caring for the dead and wounded and Resting up in the mean time. The Feds was falling Back toward Nashville. The second night we fell Back and went to Shelbyville about 25 miles South of Murfresborough and went into Camps for the Balance of the winter.