

# HISTORY

OF

## THE 21ST REGIMENT



OHIO VOLUNTEER INFANTRY,

IN

## THE WAR OF THE REBELLION

BY

Captain S. S. CANFIELD.

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### CHAPTER XIV.

MOVE ON MURFREESBORO, OR STONE'S RIVER CAMPAIGN—FIRST DAY'S BATTLE—PREPARING TO RENEW THE CONFLICT—BATTLE ON THE LEFT—ROUT OF BRECKENRIDGE—BRAGG THWARTED BY HIS SUBORDINATES—RETREAT OF THE ENEMY—OCCUPATION OF MURFREESBORO—BURIAL OF THE DEAD—REVIEW OF THE BATTLE—REPORT OF COLONEL NEIBLING.

On the 26th of December, the army marched from its several camps to meet the enemy in deadly conflict on the field of Stone's River, with full confidence in its leaders, and high hopes and anticipations of victory.

The left wing marched by the Murfreesboro pike, the right wing by Nolensville, Knob's Gap and Triune, and the center to threaten Hardee, and thence to Nolensville, where it would be in position to support either wing in case of attack.

The regiment marched to the sound of cannon nearly all day, and reached Nolensville, from which the enemy had been driven, about dark, and bivouacked for the night. The roads were very bad, so that our train did not arrive until late at night, and the next morning before starting, everything was thrown out of the wagons not absolutely necessary to be carried along, and much of value to the officers was left, which was never recovered by them.

On account of a heavy fog the next morning, the division started late with the 21st in advance. Hardee having fallen back from Triune, we marched from Nolensville across to Stewartsboro, on the Murfreesboro pike, with the rebel skirmishers in our front most of the way, stubbornly resisting our progress. Being unacquainted with the country, General Negley pressed a citizen into the service as guide; his life depended on his piloting us safely across. We bivouacked near Stewartsboro, where we remained the 28th, it being

Sunday, and General Rosecrans being averse to fighting on the Sabbath; yet there was skirmishing throughout the day. On the 29th we moved forward to Overall's Creek, driving the enemy's skirmishers. Here we were in plain sight of the enemy's works, near the Murfreesboro pike. On an eminence was a strong earthwork, and from this, rifle pits extended each way, covering the entire front of their army. The 30th was spent skirmishing, cutting roads through the cedars, and getting the army in position before the enemy, and at night we lay on our arms in line of battle. Early on the morning of the 31st the battle opened, by the enemy making a furious attack on the right of General McCook's command. We were not long in determining by the receding sound of musketry, that the right was being driven. The rebels had been ordered to attack, commencing on their left, by divisions, successively to their right. General Sheridan on the right of General Negley, disposed his division to meet the altered conditions made by the right being swung back, and when attacked repulsed the enemy, who returned to the assault, but he continued to hold them at bay until the enemy had passed his right, and his ammunition was exhausted, when he was obliged to fall back.

Withers massed his division by brigades, and moved to the attack of General Negley's division, about the time Sheridan's men became engaged. A corn field was in front of the 21st O., and as soon as the rebels came in range, the infantry opened a deadly fire on them. More persistent courage on the one hand, or greater coolness on the other, could hardly be displayed. Openings through their serried ranks were several times made by canister shot, still they came boldly on. Men fell at every step, and still they pressed forward.

"Cap, do you want to see that man come out of that saddle?"

"Yes"—and the horse was without a rider.

"Gosh! I had a dead one on him." "He'll never kill any more Yanks." "This gun never deceives me." "I know right where she carries." Such are some of the expressions made by the men of the 21st during the heat of battle.

When the enemy was only about thirty yards distant, the order was given to "fix bayonets;" but about this time they broke and fled, followed by a volley as a parting salute. It was said the bayonets was used on some parts of the line, but not on the left of the regiment. Our front clear, we had a chance to view the ghastly

sight. A deserter and a rebel major captured later, are my authority for saying, seven hundred and forty lay dead on the field before us. Shortly after the repulse, Lieutenant Colonel Neibling came along the regiment and said, "My G—d boys! we gave 'em H—ll; didn't we?" The enemy having passed us on both flanks he called out, "Fall back, we are surrounded!" How we got back through the cedars I can never tell, except that we walked—we didn't run. The rebels were behind us and on either flank. Many of the men of the 21st were fighting, and several were killed on the retreat. In falling back the men of the Regiment became badly scattered, and mixed with other commands, but a portion of them was collected, who procured ammunition and took position in support of the Board of Trade Battery, near the pike, which was being worked with telling effect on the advancing rebels. Again and again rebel officers tried to get their men to charge this battery, but were unable to get them to advance beyond the woods, about one hundred yards distant.

Night closed the conflict, the right having been driven back a mile and a half, and the right and center occupying a position along the pike, at a right angle to its position in the morning.

Soon after dark a small fire was built, and several of the men of the 21st had gathered about it, trying to get a little warmth.

General Rosecrans came up and said, "You are my men and I don't like to have any of you hurt. Where the enemy see a fire like this, they know twenty-five or thirty men are gathered about it, and are sure to shoot at it. I advise you to put it out." Scarcely was he done speaking, when sure enough a line shot came just high enough to miss the heads of the party, and a shell exploded just beyond.

About eleven o'clock we were permitted to go back out of range of the enemy's guns, build fires, and get supper, of which we were sorely in need; a hasty and scanty breakfast being the only sustenance we had had that day.

The regiment with its brigade then took position in support of General Haskell. Early the next morning we were ordered to the support of General McCook's right. About noon, of January 2, a part of a ration of flour was issued to the men, with the admonition to prepare and eat it as soon as possible. Some made paste, sweetened and drank it, others made dough, and in every conceivable way without utensils, tried to bake it. Some ate the dough partly baked; and when the order "fall in" was given, some snatched theirs from

the fire and others went away dinnerless, leaving theirs behind unbaked. The regiment, with the rest of Negley's division, went on the "double quick" about a mile and a half, filled their canteens, and laid down on the right bank of Stone's River, to await the assault of the enemy.

At precisely four o'clock, the gun at Bragg's headquarters was fired as the signal to attack. Immediately the enemy's batteries along their whole front opened fire on the Union line, and Breckenridge with 7,000 men and two batteries, moved forward to the assault of the left wing.

When they came in range, fifty-eight pieces of artillery, which had been placed in a commanding position in anticipation of the attack, opened on the advancing foe. Nothing daunted by this, they swept on.

Van Cleves division which had been stationed over the river, terrified at the onslaught of the rebels, delivered their fire, and retreated in haste, and great disorder. Men and horses a commingled mob; horses with riders and horses without—men with guns and men without, all making haste to escape, the enemy pursued vigorously and pouring a destructive fire into the retreating ranks. "My God!" said Colonel Neibling, "it was the most heartrending sight I ever saw." General Negley and Colonel Miller were endeavoring to instill calm courage into the men. Colonel Neibling instructing the regiment to measure out the sulphurous region to the rebels "by the acre," and Colonel Moody urging the 74th Ohio, not to be out done by the 21st.

Much of this, if not most of it, was altogether unnecessary.

The men who had so completely routed the enemy on the 2d of December, had full confidence in their ability to overcome on the 2d of January.

The rebels elated with their supposed victory, reached the bank of the river, to be met with a destructive volley, and charged the troops in reserve, when they recoiled, but made a stubborn resistance to the advance of the 2d division. After being driven a mile, they retreated precipitately to their entrenchments.

A battery of four guns, in the capture of which the 21st participated, was a part of the fruit of the victory. Being relieved, went back over the river, and took position in support of the artillery, which had done such excellent service during the battle. This ended the fighting of the 21st Ohio at Stone's River.

Bragg had ordered a renewal of the conflict for the 3d of January, but at 12:15 in the morning of that day, Cheatham and Withers (Major Generals and commanders of divisions,) dispatched the following note to him: "General, we deem it our duty to you, to say frankly, that in our judgment this army should be promptly put in retreat. You have but three divisions that are at all reliable, and even some of these are more or less demoralized, from having some brigade commanders who do not possess the confidence of their commands. Such is our opinion, and we deem it a solemn duty to express it to you. We do fear great disaster from the condition of things now existing, and think it should be averted if possible."

This was forwarded through Corps headquarters, and at 1:30 a. m. received Polk's endorsement, thus: "I am compelled to add, that after seeing the effect of the operations of to-day, added to that produced upon the troops by the battle of the 31st, I very greatly fear the consequences of another engagement at this place in the ensuing day. We could now get off with some credit, if the affair is well managed."

At 2 a. m. this was presented to General Bragg. His endorsement was, "The position will be maintained at all hazards."

At 3 a. m. Lieutenant General Hardee made an endorsement, in which he said: "I think the decision of the General (Bragg) unwise, and am compelled to add, in a high degree."

Yielding to the opinion of his subordinates, Bragg consented to a retreat of his army, and began the movement at noon of the 3d.

A piece of woods known as the Round Forrest, on the north bank of the river, was still occupied by a strong force of the enemy, and at six o'clock p. m. of the 3d, General Spears with the 1st Tennessee brigade attacked them.

After two hours fighting in the darkness, the enemy retreated. This closed the fighting at Stone's River.

On the morning of the 5th we moved forward and occupied the town of Murfreesboro.

I can give no better idea of the campaign just closed, and what the men were called upon to endure, than by quoting from the report of General Negley: "Without a murmur they made forced marches over almost impassable roads, through drenching winter rains, without a change of clothing or blankets, deprived of sleep or repose, constantly on duty for eleven days, living three days on a pint of flour and parched corn. Ever vigilant, always ready,

"sacrificing their lives with a contempt of peril, displaying the coolness, determination and high discipline of veterans, they are entitled to our country's gratitude."

Report of Colonel J. M. Neibling:

CAMP 21ST OHIO VOLUNTEER INFANTRY,  
Near Murfreesboro, Tenn., Jan. 10, 1863. ]

Sir:

I respectfully submit to you the following report of the action of my regiment in the battle of Stone's River.

After a march occupying three days, during which skirmishing with the enemy was fierce and continuous, by your order I bivouacked my regiment upon the field on the evening of December 29th ultimo, in its brigade position.

On the morning of December 30th ultimo, my regiment was thrown into position with reserve corps on the right center.

Sharp picket fighting occupied the day, and on the morning of December 31st ultimo, the enemy made his appearance on the center and right wing.

The battle waged with uninterrupted fury, and we lay upon the field during the night. I cannot picture to you the gallant conduct of my men during the fight of the 31st ultimo. Officers and men universally fought with desperation and bravery.

January 1, the enemy refused to show himself in force on the center, and at night we again slept on the field. January 2 indicated fight.

At 3 p. m. by your orders, my regiment took position to support General Van Cleve's division, on the left. At about 4 p. m. the enemy in force showed his front, in pursuit of our retreating troops.

Lying down in line, we watched the approach of the enemy, exulting over his fancied success. A charge was ordered, and although my regiment was much impeded by the disorganized flight of infantry, artillery and riderless horses, my regiment reached the opposite bank of Stone's River and engaged the enemy. The struggle which ensued was desperate and bloody. We succeeded in driving him beyond his line of artillery, which he left on the field as trophies. The enemy was completely routed, and night closed pursuit, leaving us in possession of a battle field, two miles in extent.

I could mention many instances of individual heroism. Captain Caton, of Company H, gallantly bore the colors across the river in the charge. Captains McMahan, Canfield and Alban, were conspicuous in the struggle.

Lieutenant Wiley, of Company C, commanding Company A, fell mortally wounded. Lieutenants Knaggs, Allen and Bumpus, fell severely wounded while cheering their men to the charge.

Lieutenant Colonel Stoughton and Major Walker deserve all praise for their efficient and prompt action during the fight. Indeed all vied with each other in the performance of their several duties.

I herewith append a list of the killed, wounded and missing, for whom amid our cheers of victory, let us not forget to drop a soldier's tear.

Very respectfully,

JAMES M. NIEBLING,

Col. Com. Twenty-First Regiment, O. V. I.

COLONEL JOHN F. MILLER,

Com. Seventh Brigade, Eighth Division, Fourteenth Army Corps.

|   | Killed. | Wounded. | Missing. | Total. |
|---|---------|----------|----------|--------|
| The Regiment lost in this battle                  | 24      | 109      | 26       | 159    |
| The 3rd Brigade lost in this battle               | 80      | 471      | 97       | 648    |
| The 2nd Division lost in this battle              | 161     | 835      | 198      | 1,194  |
| The Army of the Cumberland<br>lost in this battle | 1,730   | 7,802    | 3,675    | 13,249 |

General Rosecrans says there were engaged in the battle . . . 43,400  
Bragg states the strength of his army . . . 37,712

We captured prisoners from the following organizations:

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| 132 regiments, estimated at 350 men each, . . . . .           | 46,200 |
| 12 battalions of sharp shooters, 100 men each, . . . . .      | 1,200  |
| 29 regiments of cavalry, estimated at 400 men each, . . . . . | 11,600 |
| 24 other organizations of cavalry "70" " . . . . .            | 1,680  |
| 23 batteries, estimated at 80 men each, . . . . .             | 1,840  |
| Total estimated strength of Bragg's army . . . . .            | 62,520 |

Monday and Tuesday, details were busy burying the dead, and bringing in the helplessly wounded, who had lain on the field since the preceding Wednesday. Most of these with the dead, had been stripped of their clothing, and left to perish in the inclemency of the weather. The less severely wounded had been removed from the field, to be held as prisoners of war. This campaign of eleven days in mid-winter, had severely taxed the endurance of the men, who left camp in light marching order, with a single blanket, exposed to frequent cold rains by day and night, bivouacking on cold, damp or wet ground, much of the time without fires, all the time short of rations, in consequence of the destruction of trains at Lavergne, without change of clothing, marching, watching and fighting, all without a murmur or word of complaint.

Nor was the regiment allowed a season of rest and relaxation, immediately after this period of intense activity. Camp and garrison equipage and rations must be brought forward and, forage collected; the activity of the enemy made strong escorts necessary,

and in these arduous labors, tramping through rain and mud, loading and guarding trains, the 21st did its full share.

The army was posted in front of Murfreesboro, the right wing extending from Stone's River to the Shelbyville pike, the center covering the Woodbury, Bradyville and Manchester pikes, and the left wing across the Liberty and Lebanon pikes, its left on Stone's river. They were now styled the 20th, 14th and 21st Corps, and Generals McCook, Thomas and Crittenden retained in command.