

Daniel D. Rose 11th Michigan Infantry Company A, Account of Stones River

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FIGHTING THEM OVER.

What Our Veterans Have to Say About Their Old Campaigns.

STONE'S [sic] RIVER.

The Assault on the Unprepared Right Wing - The Pretended Re-enforcements - The Final Struggle on the East Bank of the River.

TO THE EDITOR: In "Carleton's" history of the battle of Stone's [sic] River there are a few errors, as I saw it. Without pointing out the special contrast between his account and as I saw it, I would, with your permission, make a few statements which shall cover the main points of difference.

After reaching the field on which the great struggle was to occur, the 30th of December, (Tuesday,) was occupied in manuvering [sic] - for position. The skirmishing was so general all along the lines that it would be difficult to determine which was the most vulnerable or which the strongest part of the enemy's lines. Skirmishing was brisk all along the lines, especially along the left and center; but at every point where our lines were advanced the enemy stubbornly gave way.

AS NIGHT SETTLED DOWN

upon us the soldiers lay down to rest, weary from hard marches, in a good position for defense should an attack come from the front, with our eyes open. Our right was too attenuated, without sufficient support, as we were expected to act on the offensive instead of defensive, and the main movements were to be made by the Left Wing.

Long before daylight our pickets reported the sound of moving troops in our front from left to right. As day began to dawn the troops were aroused to prepare for the day's duties. The artillery horses
WERE SENT TO WATER,

not to the rear, as "Carleton " says, but to the front, to our right, but directly to the front of Willich's Brigade, which faced west. The horses were taken about one-fourth of a mile, to a small brook which flows into Overall's Creek. While the horses were being watered and the men preparing breakfast, the guns yet stacked in line, the enemy made a rapid advance upon our flank and front, without skirmishers, so that their lines were not observed in the fog and haze of the early morning. They came with such force and so precipitately that our men were confused - they were taken by complete surprise. Some fled so precipitately from the first attack that they did not even wait to take their guns from where they were stacked.

GEN. MCCOOK

was far away. He had not heeded the warnings of the early hours. Even when he heard the roar and rattle he could not believe the battle was on, so confident was he that Crittenden and Thomas were to do this battle. After the first onslaught and the first excitement was past our forces rallied, changed their front to repel the enemy from the new direction, and resisted with a stubbornness [sic] which is truly commendable.

Attacking the army in the flank brought to bear an overwhelmingly superior force of the enemy to any troops of ours which could be adjusted to the new position. Regiment after regiment and brigade after brigade were

TORN FROM THEIR "WELL-TAKEN POSITIONS and obliged to change front either to right or rear to repel the still advancing and victorious foe. I will not follow them in detail - only give you a note of what our regiment had to do, which can be taken as a sample of what others did. We were in the Second Brigade of Negley's Division. Several times our position was changed to meet the advancing foe. At last, when we were compelled to retire from the original line of battle, the Right Wing had been crumbled little by little until not an organized body of troops was left on our right. The fighting was as heavy in our rear as in our front; our ammunition was nearly exhausted and the bayonet the only resource for safety. We changed front to right on first company, then front to rear, and

WITH FIXED BAYONETS

started through that memorable cedar forest. The forest was thick with killed and wounded of both rebel and Union soldiers, showing that the fighting here had been desperate and the same ground had been fought over by friend and foe. The enemy was in our front and rear. Several times we changed front to rear and charged back upon the advancing foe. Our brigade was the last to leave the cedars, and when half way across the open field toward the pike, the enemy showing a disposition to follow, we again charged back into the cedars, checked the advance of the enemy by the sudden countercharge, and after delivering the few remaining rounds, fell back in good order to the left of the Murfreesboro pike. This closed the active operations of the day; not at 11 o'clock, as "Carleton" would infer, but rather near 2 p. m. It was 4 o'clock before the new lines had been thoroughly adjusted and ready to again face the foe. Gen. Rosecrans had been in the saddle all day, and present on every part of the field, regardless of danger. This ended the day and ended the year.

AN EPISODE.

Now occurred an episode, which I have seen nowhere else mentioned, which will account, to some degree at least, why on Jan. 1 (Thursday) the enemy did not follow up their well-earned advantage. During the day a number of rebel prisoners had been taken. After both armies had settled down quietly to rest for the night these prisoners were lying about a few isolated camp-fires, under guard, of course. A few of our officers approached near them and began talking of the fortunes of the day, saying: "The enemy would have met with a far different reception had our re-enforcements arrived as were expected." "There would be at least 40,000 fresh troops to go into the fight when it should be renewed." "It certainly could be no later than midnight before they should arrive," and other like expressions. This was then thought by the prisoners to be news

which their friends should know. It was then thought necessary to remove the prisoners to a safer place, and in their movements from place to place in the darkness of the night a few made their "escape," and probably carried the "news" to their friends.

PHANTOM RE-ENFORCEMENTS.

In the meantime quite a large detail had been made from various regiments, - a number from the 11th Mich, and 19th Ill. - placed under a competent officer, and marched away up the Murfreesboro pike beyond the right of the army. Here were extensive open fields lying east of Overall's Creek and reaching away to the south. The night was still and of that murky condition when voices may be heard at a great distance. Upon arriving upon this open plain each soldier in the detail became a Brigadier-General, Colonel, or some active officer, and each worked very industriously for a half hour or more maneuvering [sic] and commanding in a loud voice his imaginary battalions into comfortable and secure positions for the night. When this was done each resigned his high rank, was a private again, and went at work very assiduously building camp-fires of the fine cedar rails which they found in abundance. When all the fences which could be found were converted into blazing, crackling camp-fires, the detail returned to their respective commands, and at low 12 all was quiet.

The day had ended not in disaster nor in defeat, but sadly to our cost, with

THE ADVANTAGE WITH THE ENEMY.

True, his advantage had been dearly bought and so had our sacrifice been great.

The night was a gloomy one. The rain poured upon the unprotected armies like nature weeping over the awful carnage. The clay soil was made muddy, and in a fearful condition for the movement of troops or artillery. Breastworks had been thrown up along the least protected part of the line, so that before morning Gen. Rosecrans had his army in good shape for defense, expecting the enemy to renew the attack.

THE NEW YEAR

dawned sad and gloomy. The day gradually wore away, with quite sharp skirmishing and artillery firing at times, but the enemy did not seem inclined to renew the attack and reap the advantages of the day before. True, he had been severely punished, but who knows but what the force of our "40,000 re-enforcements " may not have had its share of influence. He seemed now more inclined to act on the defensive than to renew the attack. True, during the day he showed himself at different parts of our front, but again soon retired when found we were ready for him. During the day our division (Negley's) had been placed in Reserve.

FRIDAY DAWNS.

The rain has ceased, but the dark clouds yet lower in the sky. Each army seems to feel easier and begins to move more freely. Van Cleve's Division has been sent across to the east side of the river. The most of our artillery has soon massed on a rise of ground near the west bank. Our division is placed in easy supporting distance near the west bank of the river, in rear of the artillery. Before noon an artillery duel was indulged in by

both armies; then all was quiet again. At about 3 p. m. heavy forces are seen moving in front of our left. It is the right wing of the rebel army under Breckinridge moving to

CRUSH THE DIVISION OF VAN CLEVE

as McCook's command had been swept from its position on Wednesday. On came the masses in full view of our army. Our cannon can reach every part of the field over which they must pass. The artillery opens with an enfilading fire, and, as each gun belches forth its missiles of death and destruction, the rebel ranks are rent and torn; but on they came with almost an irresistible power. Van Cleve's Division is routed and driven across the river. Now is the supreme moment of the battle. In their precipitate pursuit, the ranks of the enemy have become confused and broken, but they charged to the very water's edge. This is

THE MOST EXCITING TIME OF ALL.

It is now that that grand counter-charge is made which drove the rebel horde from the field. It was this charge upon which that grand song, "Who'll Save the Left?" is based; the song which immortalizes the gallant Col. Scott, of the 19th Ill. Our brigade was lying just back from the river's bank, on the west side. When the opportune time came, the order was "Forward! double-quick, march." Col. Stanley, of the 18th Ohio, commanding the brigade, shouted: "Up, my Michiganders, and at 'em! [sic]" We did not wait for a second invitation or command. The double-quick became a rush and a run. In crossing the river the ranks were necessarily broken, but it did not stop our progress or slacken our speed. The retreat of the enemy became a rout. They fled, helter-skelter, back over the ground upon which they had so recently exultingly advanced, throwing away their guns and all else which might impede their flight. After the first impetuous charge our progress became slower and slower. We pushed after them through the woods, out into the open cornfield, until our advance was far beyond the original line of the enemy and darkness prevented any farther pursuit. Large numbers of prisoners were taken, four pieces of artillery and a stand of colors were captured, and we were masters of the situation. Firing continued until late in the night, but gradually died away. This ended the great battle of Stone's [sic] River.

THE LAST SCENE.

In the night a cold, wintry rain set in. All day Saturday that pouring rain continued, and we yet in line of battle in an open field, with the mud becoming deeper and deeper every hour. During the day there was but little firing on either side. The night was no improvement on the previous one. It still rained incessantly. Sunday morning, Jan. 4, dawned clear and bright, with no clouds in the sky and no enemy in our front. He had retreated during the night, leaving the dead and wounded for us to care for. During to-day the army rested, excepting burial parties, who were busy all day burying the dead of friend and foe. Monday morning we advanced into Murfreesboro, driving the rear guard of the enemy's cavalry from the town, and following him far to the south, toward Manchester. - D. D. Rose, Co. A, 11th Mich.