

## STONE RIVER SKETCHES.

BY ALFRED PIRTLE,

First Lieutenant, Tenth Ohio Volunteer Infantry.

Christmas Day of 1862 had been passed quietly in camp near Nashville by the Army of the Cumberland, under Major-General W. S. Rosecrans.

By the unwritten law of a custom that had existed from the beginning of the Era, Christian armies had refrained from fighting on the birthday of the Prince of Peace.

The first division of the center, Major-General Lovell H. Rousseau commanding, upon whose staff I had the honor to serve as ordnance officer, was put in motion at an early hour of the morning of the 26th on the road toward the army of Major-General Braxton Bragg, who soon showed a disposition to dispute every mile of the advance.

It must not be expected that this paper will take up any account of the general movements or events of the brief campaign of a little more than a week which brought such great results, but rather that it shall record some of the history, some which I saw, and part I heard.

In preparing for the coming campaign I had, under the direction of Major Loomis (by order of Major-General Rousseau), Chief of Artillery of the division, whom I consulted freely, drawn fixed artillery ammunition for James' rifle cannon, ten-pounder Parrot, twelve-pounder smooth-bore, and a small supply for six-pounder smooth-bore, so that I had twenty-two wagons loaded with this branch of ammunition. Also, having advised with the General Ordnance Officer at Nashville, I drew small-arm ammunition for .69-caliber muskets, .58 Springfield rifles, .57 for Enfield rifles, and .54 for

...ing heavy wagon loads of this kind of missiles.

My train was fully equipped with six-mule teams, and I had a citizen wagonmaster, his assistant, as well as white and black citizen drivers.

When we got stretched out on the road it made quite a show.

As I had signed vouchers for all this Government property I felt deeply the responsibility, and kept my train well in hand whenever it was possible. The first day's march was a short one for our division, and I got into camp early.

A rain fell during the night, putting everybody behind time, and on the 27th it was late before we pulled out across the country on one of the worst roads teams ever hauled over, where delays of all kinds kept us till after dark reaching camp. The next day we moved late, and it was 10 o'clock in the morning before we were parked all by ourselves, without any guards. In fact, we were so worn out we wanted rest and sleep beyond anything else. Delays continued, until in the afternoon of the 30th, about 4, I reported in person my arrival to General Rousseau, very much to his relief, as he said.

That night we camped near Stewart's Creek, not far from Greensboro, on the turnpike from Nashville. While I was preparing to get to sleep as soon as possible, an orderly ordered me to report to General Rousseau, who desired me to go to the headquarters of Major-General George H. Thomas, commanding the center, to inquire of him if he desired to give me a personal order about the handling of my train on the morning morrow, which it was generally understood would see us at battle. Furnished with a guide, I rode out into the country night across the country for some distance, on an unimproved road or pathway until, in the approach to a house, a sentry challenged us, received the countersign, and passed us,

directing us to the General's headquarters, where we were again challenged, and passed into the little camp. Tents were pitched in a long row upon a small lawn in front of a frame house, such as were common in that section, for General Thomas preferred to sleep in his tent rather than turn a family out of their home, no matter how spacious it might be. Before one of the tents, in which candles gleamed, burned a large camp-fire. I gave my reins to the orderly and went to the tent, where I recognized Major George E. Flynt, Chief of Staff and Assistant Adjutant-General, who was busily writing. I reported my name, station and business. While I did so I noticed General Thomas sitting astride a chair, on the opposite side of the fire, apparently asleep, resting his arms on the back of the chair.

In my boyhood days I had seen a picture of Napoleon asleep in a chair the night before the battle of Austerlitz, and it came up before me as I looked at the veteran General, too tired to keep awake, and too anxious to go to bed. I have often recalled the warlike scene, so striking and picturesque—the white tents, the camp-fire, the nodding General, the occasional gleam of steel, and the regular footfalls of the nearest camp guard breaking the silence.

Hardly had I finished reporting to Major Flynt, when General Thomas roused up, asking who I was. I neared him and repeated my report, to which he gave polite and interested attention. Then he said that at the battle of Perryville (Ky.) there had been much valuable time lost at a critical time in the battle by the ammunition wagons being too far in the rear, and he would like to have my train within a short distance of the rear line in case of a battle the next day. He explained to me that the plan of battle required a line of battle with reserves about six hundred yards to the rear, and he would like to have my train about the same distance in the rear of

the second line. I saw the General the next day when I was right in the rear of the troops, a fact which he remembered a long time, as he told me afterward.

I shall not weary you with a general account of the battle, but shall try to record personal recollections, or incidents impressed upon me at the time.

About 9 o'clock on the morning of the 31st of December, Rousseau's division had marched as far as the cedars, on the Nashville pike, which were made the resting place of so many brave men, in a few hours, coming to a halt in the cotton fields just outside the cedars.

As the sounds of battle neared and increased, the division moved forward and disappeared in the woods, moving in the direction of the sounds, where there seemed to be the most need of help.

My train moved up until it halted on a slight elevation, from which I had a full view of all the cleared ground in every direction. It gave upon all sides an uninterrupted sight of the lay of the land. It is now the highest point in the National Cemetery at Murfreesboro. While pausing here I first saw troops under fire. A strong regiment of bluecoats, well drilled, was marching up a steep slope about half a mile away on my left, or south. With colors bravely flying, with officers and file closers at their proper places in the rear, they advanced in battalion front as if on the parade ground. From my seat on horseback I could look over the crest of the hill up which they were moving, and in the distance I saw a body of troops, but I could not determine what they were. The line advanced—I saw they moved "guide center"—keeping the most accurate alignment, until the full array was displayed on the summit; then three puffs of smoke rose from the troops in the distance, the reports of the guns were heard, and the shells dropped into the right, left, and center of the regiment so bright and gay, when, with a unanimity that seemed to have been

drilled into them, every mother's son turned and ran down the hill, save here and there a man killed or wounded lay upon the green hillside.

Nearer the sounds of battle on the right grew louder and more distinct, more small-arms fire increasing every moment. Across the cotton field a few men straggled in leisurely fashion toward the rear; an ambulance came into view; a squad of soldiers moved rather rapidly from the front; I saw more unhurt men every moment; it looked badly to me as the crowd grew larger and larger; a color-bearer with the colors thrown carelessly over his shoulder moved to the rear, and the space was filled with an unorganized mob, so numerous that I thought I was about to see another Bull Run.

In no time there were hundreds of men, crowded among ambulances and cannon and caissons, hurrying out of the cedars intent on reaching the turnpike to Nashville.

A battery at a walk, in perfect order, came out of the cedars on the side before me, which I recognized as the First Michigan, under the command of Lieutenant George W. Van Pelt; Captain Cyrus O. Loomis had been promoted from its command to Major, and Chief of Artillery of Rousseau's division. At this moment General Rousseau, followed by a single orderly, advanced from out the cedars at a gallop, and toward him I spurred my horse, then turned to my wagons and said: "General, shall I post the battery where my wagons are? It is the best position on the field." "Do it instantly. Tell Van Pelt I will get him infantry support." I rushed my horse to Van Pelt and delivered an order to him, who was cool as if on the march. He looked at the spot, nodded "Yes," and rode away to direct the first piece of the battery, while I rode up to my wagons, which I moved into a little hollow behind the knoll on which they had been, parked them as closely as possible, dismounted all the drivers, telling them to lie down under the wagons and keep as cool as they could.

In the brief time thus consumed the field in every direction had become covered with troops much demoralized and disorganized. Van Pelt had opened fire, drawing some reply from the rebel infantry in the edge of the cedars; another battery had been posted directly to his right and fired a few shots. I became so much interested in the battle that I left my wagons, remaining on the crest of the knoll to see what was going on. The battery to Van Pelt's right was Battery H, Fifth U. S. Artillery, belonging to the regular brigade of our division, commanded by Lieutenant Frank L. Guenther. This battery was organized early in the war by Captain W. H. Ferrell, who was distinguished at Shiloh, and made a Brigadier-General of Volunteers, but met an early death at Perryville (Ky.) October 8, 1862. Lieutenant Guenther had been in command and remained in command many months. Promotion was "very slow" in his case, as happened many a man in the "regulars" in that war.

He had been posted in his position by Major Loomis, and the regular brigade was supporting the two batteries on the right and left, with the Second Ohio Infantry on their right and some troops of Van Cleve's division on the left of the regulars—I never knew what command they were.

And on this nucleus General Rosecrans began to reform his line of battle, extending it northwardly. The left of the line at this time was mostly of Crittenden's corps, the left wing, which was but slightly disorganized.

There came one of those strange lulls in battle; it seemed to mean something. I was standing near a gun rather to the rear of the First Michigan Battery looking toward the dark cedars, where I knew the enemy were, because none of our forces remained beyond the front of these two batteries and their supports. A small space of ground lay before us; then the turnpike, then a cotton patch about three hundred yards wide. Near the right edge of this cotton patch was a clump of

small trees, tall weeds, and deep grass. Lying scattered on the surface of the cotton patch were some dead men and some wounded men in gray, moving now and then, but not much; no signs of life visible in the cedars, but all eyes turned there, for into their depths the enemy had gone, and from them they must come, or in there we must go.

As I looked on, an officer on foot, sword in hand, sprang into view with a shout; in an instant the edge of the timber was alive with a mass of arms, heads, legs, guns, swords, gray coats, brown hats, shirt sleeves, and the enemy were upon us, yelling, leaping, running. Not a shot from them for a few jumps, then one or two paused to throw up their guns, fire and yell, and then run forward to try to gain the front. By no order that I heard, the whole of the guns in the two batteries together fired, covering their front with a cloud of smoke, hiding all objects in it, and then as fast as they could load they fired into the cloud. They ceased, and, as the curtain of vapor rolled up, not a moving object beneath it came into sight, but the dreadful effects of the cannonade were shown. The number of the dead and wounded had been fearfully increased, and cries and groans reached our ears. On our side men had been wounded, and horses killed or crippled, but no great loss inflicted. At my feet one of the Michigan gunners lay wounded, but refused to leave the field.

I went to my train, which was undisturbed, and I decided that the time to move had not yet come. Back to the front I went to take in the scene, for I felt the enemy would make another charge because this was the first point where they had met with such stubborn and successful resistance, and the position must be carried. Since the first attack at daybreak they had for miles swept up everything in their impetuous, unceasing rush, and now victory was within their grasp, since if this brief stand was carried, Rosecrans would be rolled away from the road to Nashville, perhaps routed.

Major Loomis was encouraging his old command by a few words of praise. I heard him tell Van Pelt that the enemy was going to make another charge, and "you give them double-shotted canister as hot as hell will let you." He went to the regular battery, where Lieutenant Guenther and his Second Lieutenant, Israel Ludlow, were preparing for the next charge, and gave them the same warlike orders. The interval this time was used by our men in getting the guns depressed so as to take the ground from the turnpike to the cedars; in filling wab buckets, taking harness off dead horses, replacing sound complements for damaged ones, and caring for the wounded. The enemy were reconnoitering the position carefully, as much as they could of sight as possible, though occasionally one would be seen; but the silence on their side was ominous.

All this time our army was being rapidly placed in position on the new line of battle, keeping the two batteries for the pivot, as I have mentioned, extending up the turnpike. The loss of the men recovered their spirits wonderfully as soon as they reached the open, where "they had any show," as they said.

The advance of the enemy the third time was in several parallel lines of battle, with a front long enough to cover both batteries. These lines (I could not see how many, for they soon became hid in the smoke) advanced very rapidly and completely deployed, at which instant our batteries opened on them with a deafening, unceasing, deadly fire, throwing twenty or thirty-four pounds of missiles from each piece across the small gap without any decided interval between the discharges. I stood myself at this moment between the batteries in company with Major Loomis and Major Carpenter, commander of the regiment of the Nineteenth Regular Infantry. Like me, they were fascinated by the rash bravery of our foes, who seemed determined to have those guns at any cost. I never saw guns fired in a more rapid trial drill as fast as those were now. Before the

recoil was expended, the gunners grasped the spokes and threw the pieces into position; like lightning the sponge was run in, turned and withdrawn, the load sent home and the piece fired. Such a roar was deafening, making our little group use signs to each other.

When I first told my friends at home about this moment of thrilling interest, some one asked me if I was afraid, knowing I had never been under fire before. To this I said, "I do not remember that I was afraid or conscious of the danger, but I was so filled with the sense of the great excitement and the importance of repulsing the enemy that I wished they had but a single neck, that I might cut it off with one stroke of my saber."

And the enemy! They were running, swarming across the field, firing and shouting; we could not hear them, but we got sight now and then of their waving arms and weapons, while every moment a bullet hissed near us, or we would see some man in the batteries fall, or perhaps a horse rear, plunge and drop. We kept our gaze fastened on the charge coming, coming on like the breakers of the sea, always nearer at each succeeding wave. But men were not yet born who could longer face that storm of iron sweeping death and destruction to all in its path. They broke, they fled, some taking refuge in the small clump of trees I have mentioned. Our fire ceased, and cheers of victory rose from the manly throats of our brave cannoneers, which were taken up on the right and left as soon as it was seen that the charge had been repulsed, followed by handshaking and congratulation on all sides, changed into a perfect frenzy of cheers at the charge of the Second Ohio Infantry into the bushes, returning with a flag and a group of prisoners.

My attention was now drawn to my train, which had become stalled on the railroad track. While engaged in extricating it, officers and men began to come to me clamoring

for ammunition, which I issued to all regardless of any forms. I had painted on the wagon tops the caliber of the cartridges in each wagon so as to save time in issuing, and here it worked to a charm. Major Loomis was rapidly placing the fixed artillery ammunition where it was most needed.

It was at this time I noticed General Rosecrans ride by with his staff, and I got an encouraging smile from him. General Thomas passed also, but I did not know for some time that he had seen the opportune result of having my wagons right there just then, though months after he told me he had seen the work going on. I was interrupted in issuing ammunition by

a battery of the enemy getting the range of the wagon tops, and the first thing I knew shot began to fly around, and one struck a wagon I was issuing from. Well, I lost no time, but dropped to the ground and spread myself out about as thin as a sheet of paper, expecting the load would explode when the shell burst: but it didn't burst, whereupon I took the hint and moved my train in lively manner to a safer place in the rear.

Just then a tremendous fire of musketry broke out in the cedars, continuing for some time, but I did not know until night that it was the desperate advance into the cedars made by the regular brigade.

My train was stationed now in the rear of the center, yet kept in touch with the division by sending a man to guide a member of the staff where I was to be found, which information brought many ordnance officers to my train outside of the division, to whom I issued all they wanted. Besides, I issued every afternoon during the long battle to the brigade ordnance officers of our division, and in this way the men were kept fully supplied at all times. In the four days I issued 100,000 rounds of small-arms ammunition and the twenty-two wagon loads of fixed artillery ammunition.

General Rousseau had commanded the regular brigade for many months. It was composed as follows:

The First Battalion Fifteenth U. S. Infantry, Major John H. King.

The First Battalion Sixteenth U. S. Infantry and Company B, Second Battalion, Major Adam Slemmer.

The First Battalion Eighteenth U. S. Infantry and Companies A and D, Second Battalion, Major James N. Caldwell.

The Second Battalion Eighteenth U. S. Infantry and Companies B, C, E, and F, Third Battalion, Major Frederick Townsend.

The First Battalion Nineteenth U. S. Infantry, Major Stephen D. Carpenter.

The whole brigade under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Oliver L. Shepherd, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry.

I had made the acquaintance of Major John H. King and several officers of the Fifteenth Infantry when it was recruiting at Newport Barracks, Newport, Kentucky, in the summer of 1861, becoming thus personally interested in the career of the battalion, having followed its history up to the time of the battle. I was also somewhat acquainted with officers of the other battalions, with whom I had been in business contact frequently. These facts of comradeship made me anxious, when I reached our headquarters at dark, and learned of the loss of Major Carpenter and other friends, to hear all I could about the gallant demonstration the brigade had made in the cedars at the moment I had moved my train from the neighborhood of the batteries.

So high an estimate have I always had of this movement that I hold too little has been printed on the topic, nor do I think enough can be said in praise of the behavior of this command all during the fighting.

After the repulse I have endeavored to fitly narrate, General Rosecrans, in order to hold back the enemy long enough to give some shape to the new line of battle, as well as to secure the center on the high ground, selected the regular brigade to

go into the cedars again. Of this Major-General Thomas says in his report: "In the execution of this movement, the regular brigade, under Lieutenant-Colonel Shepherd, Eighteenth U. S. Infantry, came under a most murderous fire, losing twenty-two officers and 508 men in killed and wounded, but with the co-operation of Scribner's and Beatty's brigades and Guenther's and Loomis' batteries, gallantly held its ground against overwhelming odds." And General Thomas was not given to exaggeration or flattering phrases. In regard to the fight in the cedars, Lieutenant-Colonel Shepherd says in the style of simple narrative usual to the thorough military man: "The excellence of the firing by file by all the battalions of the brigade could not be excelled, and was terrifying and destructive to the enemy, who were brought to a stand for about twenty minutes." Those were dearly-bought minutes; still, they enabled Rosecrans to so far carry out his plans as to align his troops on his new line, which was not penetrated at any point or seriously threatened during the remainder of the battle.

Again in his report Lieutenant-Colonel Shepherd says: "The enemy's lines extending, however, beyond both flanks, enabled them to pour an incessant fire from three directions, the front, left and right flank, and the brigade, being unsupported by any other forces on either flank, and having secured no time for the receding regiments to reform, I thought it proper to order a retreat, which was probably quite long enough deferred."

That showed that the commanding officer understood that a handful of men were to make any needed sacrifice to hold the enemy twenty minutes. They fell back in good order to occupy their former position near the batteries. The work was done, and well done, but look at the cost—"four hundred and eighteen wounded, and seventy-eight men killed, exclusive of forty missing"—out of

the force that went into the cedars, which numbered close to 1,440.

I do not mean to in the slightest disparage the deeds of the volunteers, because I belong to them, but here was a shining example of the value of the thorough training of officers and men, also of the esprit de corps which kept them at their post of duty though they realized they were being sacrificed.

I do not personally know of the fighting after the charge of the enemy on the batteries. The recorded reports show that there were engaged in those attacks, the Sixteenth Tennessee Infantry, Colonel Savage, which lost 207 men out of 402; the Eighth Tennessee Infantry, Colonel Moore (who died of his wounds), which lost 306 men out of 425, and the Thirtieth Arkansas Infantry, which lost during the day ninety-five men out of 266 who were at roll call in the morning; all leaving a striking demonstration of the gallantry of the American soldier.

The brilliant handling of the rebel cavalry on the 31st of December cut off communications with Nashville, making supplies very scarce for a day or two with quite a portion of the army. I learned of the scarcity of food from the fact that, as fast as my wagons were emptied of ammunition, they were sent out of the lines under escort to forage for corn for the horses of the army, and as they came into the lines squads of soldiers would gather around them and ask for the grain to parch for rations. Major-General Negley, in his official report, says of the privations of his men, "living three days on a pint of flour and parched corn." General Rousseau says of his command: "The rain on the night of the 31st, which continued at intervals until the Saturday night following, rendered the ground sloppy and muddy, and during much of the time my men had neither shelter, food, or fire. I procured corn, which they parched and ate, and some of them ate horse steaks, cut from the horses on the battlefield, and broiled."

and in another place he speaks of General Thomas in a way that showed that even then General Thomas was looking after the comfort of his men: "They were much encouraged by the constant presence and solicitous anxiety of General Thomas for their welfare."

Stephen D. Carpenter, a native of Maine, entered West Point July 1, 1836; graduated July 1, 1840. Brevetted Second Lieutenant, First Infantry U. S. A., July 1, 1840. Served in the Florida War 1840-41. Mexican War 1846-48. In Texas on various dates from 1848 to 1858. Wounded in an engagement with Comanche Indians October 13, 1855. Appointed Major Nineteenth Infantry, May 14, 1861. Joined the Army at the Ohio February, 1862. Participated in the battle of Perryville, Ky., October 8, 1862. At the head of the Ninth Infantry, in the cedars at Stone River, he was struck by six balls, and fell dead from his horse at the moment the retreat began.

My gallant friend, Major Cyrus O. Loomis, had been mustered as Colonel of the First Michigan Light Artillery November 5, 1862, but it was not generally known, and he was called "Major" until after the battle. He remained in the service; was brevetted Brigadier-General U. S. Volunteers June 20, 1865, for "gallant and meritorious services," and was discharged July 29, 1865. He died at the National Military Asylum at Washington, D. C., whence his body was sent to Detroit for burial, but by some mistake it was carried on to Chicago, and on the return to Detroit the express car caught fire, creating the remains of General Loomis.

George W. Van Pelt enlisted as a private in Company A, First Michigan Light Artillery, for three years, May 31, 1861. At the battle of Stone River he had reached the rank of First Lieutenant, and received the highest praise from his superior

officers for the handling of his battery in that action. He met his death in action at Chickamauga, September 19, 1863.

Francis L. Guenther entered the army from West Point July 1, 1859; was on duty at Fort Randall at the breaking out of the war as full Second Lieutenant; promoted to First Lieutenant May 14, 1861; at Camp Wood, Ky., winter of 1861-62; advanced to rank of Captain, Fifth Artillery, July 2, 1863; was in command of Camp Marshall, near Washington, D. C., September, 1863; took part in the battle of Missionary Ridge, November 25, 1863. He has served with distinguished ability until lately, when he was discharged with the rank of Brigadier-General, and retired, and resides in New York City.

Lieutenant Israel Ludlow was a man to know whom was to admire. His tall figure attracted attention, and his quiet, unassuming manners were highly pleasing. Brave, prompt, intelligent, and active, he made a fine record in the service. Of him an intimate friend said: "I do not think he ever had an enemy, and am certain he never deserved one. His was a very fine character." He resigned from the army July 31, 1865, and became a lawyer. He died at Fredericksburg, Texas, April 28, 1873.

It is interesting to note that these three young men, Guenther, Ludlow, and Van Pelt, were all about twenty-five years old at this battle.

As I sit in my well-lighted library, surrounded by every comfort, and go over the sufferings and privations that I knew the men of the ranks passed through at this battle, I can not help asking: "Has our country done all that should have been done for the brave private soldiers who braved all these privations?"

Saturday, the 3d of January, 1863, the wagons began to come up, and that night I remember we, at Rousseau's head-

quarters, had hot biscuits for supper, and "Old Thornton," the  
barky cook, had his hands full keeping our table supplied.

Rosecrans had, according to the official reports, 43,400 men;  
Bragg had, according to his official reports, 37,712 men.

Rosecrans lost in killed and wounded 8,788, or 20.22 per  
cent.; Bragg lost in killed and wounded 10,266, or 29.47 per  
cent.