

LAUMAN'S CHARGE AT JACKSON.

BY MAJOR AND BREVET-COLONEL GEO. W. CROSLY.

[The following paper was read by Colonel Crosley before the Commandery of "The Loyal Legion of Iowa," at its meeting in Des Moines, March 14, 1893. It appears also in the published records of that body.]

Commander and Companions.

The main motive that actuates me in the preparation of this paper, is to pay a just tribute to the memory of my dead comrades. I am therefore solicitous, that it shall contain nothing that will not meet with the cordial approval and endorsement of all the survivors of the bloody conflict it is intended to commemorate. But a few years more, and none will remain to give personal testimony as to the facts connected with military events, in which they took part, or of which they were witnesses. These fragments of history may, and let us cherish the hope, will be preserved long after we are gone, by all who shall sacredly cherish the memory of our Country's defenders. No poem, recounting the deeds of brave and heroic men, doing battle for their country, and nobly sustaining the honor of its flag, has been so universally read and admired, as that of the immortal Tennyson describing the charge of the "Light Brigade" at Balaclava. With the slight draft upon the imagination, necessary to suggest the requisite changes to fit a different arm of the service, the character and nationality of the troops engaged, and the scene of the conflict, that poem might be read as truly descriptive of the charge of the First Brigade of the Fourth Division of the Sixteenth Army Corps at Jackson, Mississippi, on Sunday, July 12, 1863.

The Regiments composing the Brigade were the 3rd Iowa, 41st and 53rd Illinois and the 33rd Wisconsin Infantry. The 33rd Wisconsin had been detached from the Brigade on some special duty and therefore did not participate in the assault. Its place was taken by the 28th Illinois Infantry.

These four small Regiments had all been constantly engaged

in active service for over two years. They had taken part in many severe engagements, and their ranks had become so greatly decimated, that the entire Brigade numbered less than a full Regiment of effective fighting men, on the morning of that fatal 12th of July. It was indeed a "Light Brigade" in point of numbers, at least.

We had all participated in the Siege of Vicksburg from its commencement until the morning of that glorious Fourth of July when the rebel stronghold surrendered.

On the morning of the 5th, turning from the scene of our triumph, we had promptly moved to the support of General Sherman, who was advancing to attack the rebel forces under the command of General Joseph E. Johnston. That General, declining an engagement in the open field, slowly retired before us until he reached his strongly intrenched position at Jackson.

On the evening of the 11th the Fourth Division was closing in on the right of Sherman's Army to complete the investment of the city. The First Brigade, with the gallant Colonel I. C. Pugh of the 41st Illinois in command, was advanced with orders to keep aligned with General A. P. Hovey on our left. We pushed the enemy's skirmishers well back towards their intrenchments, and were still advancing when night closed in and it became too dark for us to reach the position we had been ordered to occupy. We were ordered to halt and go into bivouac for the night. We did not expect that we should be ordered to carry the enemy's works by assault the next day, on the contrary everything seemed to indicate that General Sherman had determined to reduce Jackson by the same methods that General Grant had employed at Vicksburg—a series of regular siege operations. We knew, of course, that more or less severe skirmishing would take place before we reached the position assigned to us the next day. After that, however, we did not anticipate such stubborn and prolonged resistance as we had met with at Vicksburg.

As we slept upon our arms that summer night, we did not dream that before the sun of another day had reached the

meridian, more than half our number would be lying upon the hillside before us, dead or wounded. All was quiet along the picket line in our front. The night was clear, there was no moon, but the stars shown brightly. We lay beneath the open sky and slept, as we had so often slept before, in the immediate presence of the enemy, our slumber as profound and undisturbed as though we had been resting beneath the roofs of the dear homes in the far away north. The slumbers of the unhappy citizens were no doubt broken and unquiet, for unlike the soldiers who defended them, and their assailants, they were unused to "the dreadful of war" and could not compose their minds to peaceful slumber amid the dangers that surrounded and threatened their homes.

" 'Twas midnight ere our guns' grim laugh

O'er their wild work did cease,

And at the smouldering fires of war,

We lit the pipe of peace.

At four, a burst of Bells went up thro' nights

Cathedral dark.

It seemed so like our Sabbath chimes, we could but lie and hark ;

So like the bells that call to prayer in the dear land far away ;

Their music floated on the air, and charmed us to betray.

Our camp lay in the quiet vale, all silent as a cloud,

Its very heart of life stood still and the white mist brought its shroud ;

For death was walking in the dark, and smiled *his* smile to see

How all was ranged and ready for a sumptuous jubilee."

As day dawned we were rudely awakened, and reminded of the close proximity of the enemy, by the brisk firing which at once began along the picket line, only a short distance in front of us. But we had become so well used to that familiar sound that it did not greatly disturb us. Our first thought was to satisfy the imperative needs of the "inner man." We partook of the usual hard-tack and coffee, were strengthened and refreshed, and ready for the work before us. Several hours passed, however, before the order to advance was given, and it was nearly nine o'clock when we crossed the railroad, formed in line of battle and deployed our skirmishers. Surely time enough for the advance had elapsed for General Ord to have fully perfected all the details which, as was afterwards explained to us.

—was simply for the purpose of taking a position indicated, as necessary to complete the prolongation of the line of investment to the right, in the direction of Pearl River. We were expected to force the enemy's heavy line of pickets back upon their main line, or to their outer defenses, if such were encountered, then halt and construct rifle pits to protect our own line. We had successfully executed many such movements before Corinth and Vicksburg. If the nature of the ground over which we had to pass, and the position of the enemy's advance line had been ascertained by the usual methods, and explicit orders given to General Lauman, who had so often demonstrated his ability as a Brigade and Division Commander, we are justified in believing that the useless slaughter that ensued might have been avoided. Colonel Aaron Brown, who commanded the Third Iowa, fell severely wounded early in the engagement, and the command devolved upon the writer. A copy of my brief report was forwarded to the Adjutant General of Iowa, in compliance with his request, and I find it on page 427 of his report of the operations of Iowa troops, made to Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood in 1864. I have not been able to obtain the Report of Colonel Pugh who commanded the Brigade, or those of the 28th, 41st and 53rd Illinois Regiments. It is now nearly thirty years since that bloody conflict—short in duration, but most terrible in results—took place. I may, therefore, be pardoned for presenting here my own report, rather than to rely upon my memory, after the lapse of nearly one third of a century.

HEADQUARTERS THIRD IOWA INFANTRY, }
NEAR VICKSBURG, MISS., July 26, 1863. }

Col. N. B. Baker, Adjutant General of Iowa.

COLONEL:—I have the honor to submit the following report of the conduct and loss of the 3d Iowa Infantry in the assault on the enemy's works at Jackson, Miss., July 12, 1863. About nine o'clock on the morning of the 12th, the 3d Iowa, 41st and 53d Illinois Infantry and the 5th Ohio Battery of six guns, crossed the New Orleans & Jackson Railroad, at a point about two miles south of Jackson, and one mile from the enemy's works. After crossing, line of battle was formed, skirmishers thrown out, and the line ordered forward. After advancing about one-fourth of a mile the line was halted, the Battery placed in position one hundred yards in our rear, opened fire with shell and continued to fire rapidly

for about twenty minutes. The enemy replied promptly with two guns, getting our range the first shot. As soon as the Battery ceased firing the line again moved forward. We advanced half a mile through timber and dense undergrowth, our skirmishers meeting with no opposition. When we came to the edge of an open field, the line was again halted. Here we were joined by the 28th Illinois Infantry, which took position on our right. General Lauman now came up and ordered the line forward, the skirmishers keeping well advanced. When about half way across the field our skirmishers engaged the enemy's pickets. Soon after their picket reserves were encountered and driven in, and a moment later we came within sight of their works, about three hundred yards distant. The enemy now opened fire with twelve pieces of artillery, all bearing directly upon our line; and also gave us a heavy fire of musketry. The men answered this greeting with a shout, and rushed forward to the assault. We were met by a perfect storm of grape, canister and musketry. The timber and brush had been cleared away in front of the enemy's works and an abattis formed which broke our line and threw the men into groups, thus giving the enemy's artillery an opportunity to work with most deadly effect. Our line rapidly melted away under this terrible fire, and after getting up to within seventy-five yards of the works, we found ourselves too weak to carry them by assault, and after remaining under this severe fire for twenty minutes, we were compelled to fall back. We brought off our colors safely and reformed at the place where we had last halted previous to advancing to the assault. We were then ordered back to the point where we had first crossed the railroad. The regiment went into action with 223 enlisted men, 15 line and three field and staff officers—making an aggregate of 241 rank and file engaged. Out of this number we lost 114 killed, wounded and missing. Part of our wounded and all of our dead were left on the field. An attempt was made to bring off our killed and wounded, under a flag of truce, but it was unsuccessful. After the evacuation of Jackson, a few days subsequent to the fight, we recovered part of our men who had been left in the hospital; but those who were able to be moved had been taken away as prisoners of war. Most of those reported as missing are known to be wounded. Of the conduct of both officers and men during this, the severest conflict in which the regiment has been engaged, I cannot speak too highly; all did their duty nobly, and it is impossible to make special mention of any one without doing injustice to others. The inclosed list of killed and wounded will show how the regiment fought, better than I have been able to describe it.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

G. W. CROSLY,

Major Commanding 3d Iowa Infantry.

It is a fact too well known to require comment here, that the volunteer soldier of America possesses that average high degree of intelligence, which enables him to form an approximately correct judgment of the situation confronting or surrounding him in battle, almost, if not quite as quickly as the officers under whose immediate command he is fighting. But

he has learned in the hard, but necessary school of military discipline, that he cannot act upon his own judgment, that he must obey orders, and let the responsibility rest upon the officer who commands him.

“Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die.”

That some one had blundered in giving the order for that hopeless charge, we knew right well. The moment the enemy's works came into view, and our skeleton brigade was ordered to assault them, we realized that it was a forlorn hope. Looking to the left we saw that the troops there had come to a halt, glancing to the rear we could see no troops moving to our support. In our front frowned the formidable works of the enemy. It was clear to the comprehension of the dullest soldier in the ranks that our small force, unsupported, could not reach, much less capture those works. I here quote briefly from the account of Lieutenant S. D. Thompson, in his book entitled “Recollections of the 3d Iowa Regiment,” and, but for the necessary limit of time, would be glad to give his graphic description of the charge in full:

“Colonel Pugh now reported his position in person to General Lauman, who still ordered him to advance. It must have been a harrowing moment to him. There stood the remnant of his gallant brigade, now only eight hundred strong, which he was ordered to destroy. His order was imperative and he was too true a soldier to question, much less to disobey it. Colonel Pugh gave the order to *Charge!* The enemy opened with fourteen pieces, and two brigades of infantry rose from their concealment and poured a converging fire upon that devoted band. The men raised the shout and sprang forward through that thick storm of death. A few moments and all was over. The line crumbled into broken bands, which arrived within pistol-shot of the embrasures, and halted and staggered, and were swept away.”

Companions, I think it is not claiming too much for the men of that old brigade, to say that they were as well disciplined, as intelligent and brave a body of soldiers as ever followed our flag or fought beneath its folds. The men of the 3d Iowa promptly rallied to their colors, after emerging from that hell of battle, and as they again came into line, there was a look of determination mingled with sadness upon their faces

that I shall never forget. I hazard nothing in saying that at that moment had the order been given to charge again, it would have been as promptly obeyed as the first order had been. To die upon that hillside, thickly strewn with our dead, and where many of our wounded and helpless comrades still lay, was not a thought to inspire terror. It was rather a privilege to be sought. At Shiloh, where this same brigade had twice rolled back the mighty tide which surged and beat against it, and when the smoke of battle had lifted, beheld the ground strewn thickly with the enemy's dead and wounded, we had been lost in admiration for the valor of our foe. But there we had not fought behind breastworks. We stood in line of battle in the open field and received the fire of the enemy, and suffered heavy loss from his repeated attacks. There the battle raged for the greater part of two days, while here, we had in a few minutes lost more than half our number in killed and wounded, and had been able to inflict but comparatively slight loss upon the enemy in his secure and almost impregnable position. We knew well that a second attempt meant a second failure, with equal or greater loss, yet no feeling of dismay would have come to us had the order been repeated. It is simply impossible for those who have not had a similar experience, to comprehend the feeling of absolute contempt for death which had taken possession of us. But to many, if not to all of you, Companions, the same feeling has doubtless come at some fateful moment in your soldier career, and you look back upon it with a feeling of satisfaction that you rarely—if ever—feel in contemplating any other incident of your past life. To have had such a feeling, if only for a few brief moments, enables one to know what total self-abnegation means. The impartial witnesses to that fatal charge vastly outnumbered those who participated in it. I wish to add the testimony of a few of these witnesses. But a few months before his death, I had the pleasure of meeting General A. P. Hovey, then Governor of Indiana, at his home in Indianapolis. In the presence of a number of gentlemen he said to me—and I have carefully treasured his words—"Colonel Crosley,

I was a personal witness of the charge of the First Brigade of General Lauman's Division at Jackson, and it was one of the most desperate charges ever made by soldiers upon any battle field. I was astonished when I saw the Brigade break from its alignment with my Division, and advance to the assault, and I instantly knew that some one had made a terrible mistake. No troops ever behaved more gallantly, and our army had no braver officer than General Lauman. I can give no opinion as to the personal responsibility of General Ord or General Lauman for that useless slaughter of brave men. No official investigation was ever had. General Lauman, who was peremptorily relieved of his command, constantly insisted upon the fullest investigation, but died at his home in Iowa without his request having been granted. We who witnessed the charge *knew* you could not succeed. Had I received an order to detach the Brigade of my division next to you in line to your support, the result would have been the same, they would only have shared your fate. But the fact was, no troops were within supporting distance of your brigade when it made the charge."

General W. Q. Gresham was also a personal witness to the assault. He was one of the first officers I met (outside of my command) when the assault was over, and I shall never forget his sympathetic greeting. In a conversation I had with him some years ago, when he was a guest of Crocker's Iowa Brigade at its Cedar Rapids Reunion, he spoke feelingly of our terrible loss, and regretfully of the consequences to General Lauman, for whom he entertained a high personal regard. Recently—since I had decided to prepare a paper upon this subject—I wrote to General Gresham, asking him to do me the favor of giving me his personal recollections of the charge, with permission to incorporate his reply in this paper. I regret that he was unable to fully comply with my request, but his brief reply completely corroborates the personal statement of

General Hovey, and I am glad to be able to present it here :

CHICAGO, February 20, 1893.

MY DEAR COLONEL:—For some days I have been overwhelmed with correspondence, and court business, and have but just read your friendly letter of the 15th inst. I can only take time to thank you for it. If I can get an hour's time, it will afford me pleasure to give you my recollections of that disastrous charge by your Brigade at Jackson, Mississippi, July 12th, 1863. The assault was as heroic as it was disastrous, and it may be that the responsibility for the terrible loss of so many gallant men will always remain a matter of uncertainty.

Very truly yours,

W. Q. GRESHAM.

General W. T. Sherman says in his personal Memoirs, page 359 :

"General Ord accused the commander (General Lauman) of having disregarded his orders, and attributed to him personally the disaster and heavy loss of men. He requested his relief, which I granted, and General Lauman went to the rear and never regained his division. He died after the war, in Iowa, much respected, as before that time he had been universally esteemed a most gallant and excellent officer."

General Sherman further says in his Memoirs, page 361 :

"In the attack on Jackson, Mississippi, during the 11th to 16th of July, General Ord reported the loss in the Thirteenth Army Corps 762 of which 533 were confined to Lauman's division. General Parkes reported, in the Ninth Corps, 37 killed, 258 wounded and 33 missing; total 328. In the Fifteenth Corps the loss was less; so, in the aggregate, the loss as reported by me at the time was less than a thousand men, while we took that number alone of prisoners."

The loss in Lauman's Division was almost exclusively confined to the First Brigade, which sustained a loss of over 500 in killed and wounded, in the charge on the morning of the 12th. Thus it will be seen that the loss in that charge was more than one-half that of the Ninth, Thirteenth and Fifteenth Army Corps in all the operations against Johnston's army from the 5th to the 17th of July, when Jackson was evacuated. In closing I feel in honor bound to say a few words in justice to the memory of my old commander. General Jacob G. Lauman entered the service as Colonel of the 7th Iowa Infantry. He commanded his regiment in the battle of Belmont, where he was severely wounded and won special mention from General Grant for his gallant conduct. At Fort Donelson he commanded a Brigade in Smith's Division, consisting of the

2d, 7th and 12th Iowa and 25th Indiana regiments. His Brigade stormed the enemy's works on our left and compelled the surrender of the Fort. At Shiloh he commanded the Third Brigade of the Fourth Division, which did splendid service in that great battle and was again specially mentioned for gallant conduct. His personal courage was of the first order, and his humanity and kindness to the men under his command was conspicuous upon all occasions. After his promotion to the command of the Fourth Division of the Sixteenth Corps, the 3d was the only Iowa regiment in his Division. We, in common with the other regiments under his command, considered ourselves exceedingly fortunate in having him for our leader. It was naturally most gratifying to us because he was from our own State, and we were proud of the brilliant reputation he had made. From the date of his promotion to the rank of Brigadier General, the soldiers he commanded had never known defeat, until the morning of that fatal day at Jackson. His friends will always believe that he obeyed General Ord's orders, and was unjustly relieved of his command.

And now, Companions, had I the power of the trained elocutionist, to enable me to recite the soul-stirring poem describing the charge of that other Light Brigade, I might feel that I had succeeded in entertaining you for a few moments, at least, in closing. As I am not an elocutionist, I can only imitate the action of my old Brigade and make the attempt, knowing that I shall at least have the support of your forbearance and sympathy.

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

"Forward the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!" he said:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

"Forward the Light Brigade!"
Was there a man dismayed?
Not though the soldier knew
Some one had blundered:
Theirs not to make reply,

Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die—
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them,
Volleyed and thundered ;
Stormed at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well ;
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.

Flashed all their sabres bare,
Flashed as they turned in air,
Sabering the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
All the world wondered :
Plunged in the battery smoke,
Right through the line they broke ;
Cossack and Russian
Reeled from their sabre-stroke,
Shattered and sundered :—
Then they rode back—but not,
Not the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
Volleyed and thundered :
Stormed at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell,
They that had fought so well
Came through the jaws of Death
Back from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them,
Left of six hundred.

When can their glory fade?
Oh, the wild charge they made !
All the world wondered !
Honor the charge they made !
Honor the Light Brigade,
Noble six hundred !

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