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The Iowans at Fort Donelson

General C. F. Smith's Attack on the Confederate Right
February 12-16, 1862

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(Part II)

After the decision to fall back into the Fort Donelson perimeter had been made, General Buckner, in spite of his views to the contrary, prepared to carry out his superiors' mandate. Furthermore, Buckner had been admonished by Generals Floyd and Pillow to get his men back to their original positions as rapidly as possible. The reason was that it appeared the Yankees were about to launch a massive assault on Colonel Head's badly outnumbered regiment. Since the bluecoats made no effort to pursue, Buckner was able to disengage his division without any difficulty. Having first secured the two 24-pounder howitzers captured by them, Buckner's troops fell back and re-entered the perimeter in the Erin Hollow sector. Buckner's retreat was covered by the 2d Kentucky and the 41st Tennessee. Upon reaching the fortifications, Buckner's exhausted troops still had, depending upon the sector of the rifle pits held, from one to one and one-half miles to go before they gained their former battle stations. Even so, all of Buckner's units except the 2d Kentucky and the 14th Mississippi were able to reach their former positions before Smith's attack was driven home. Unfortunately for the Confederates, however, it was against the rifle pits originally held by the Kentuckians, and now occupied by Major Turner's three companies that Lauman's bluecoats moved.⁶²

The panting infantrymen of the 3d, 18th, 32d, and 41st Tennessee, having made a forced march, filed into their

⁶² O.R., Series I, Vol. VII, 333.

trenches a few minutes before Smith's onslaught. Porter's and Graves' cannoners likewise returned to their original emplacements, where they had unlimbered their guns.⁶³

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Once Colonel Tuttle had given the word, the rugged infantrymen of the 2d Iowa, deployed in double line of battle, took up the advance. As the troops started forward, several officers glanced at their watches. It was a little past 2 p.m. With Colonel Tuttle at its head, the left battalion descended the timber covered eastern face of the hollow, which separated Smith's line of departure from the Confederate rifle pits crowning the opposite ridge. The right battalion led by General Smith and Colonel Baker followed about 150 yards in rear of the left wing. Company B, 25th Indiana, deployed as skirmishers, inadvertently took up the advance at the same time. The Hoosiers marched on the Hawkeyes' right.⁶⁴

Four of the five other regiments constituting Lauman's attacking force advanced *en echelon* on the right and on the left of the 2d Iowa. The 52d Indiana was on Tuttle's left. The 25th Indiana, the 7th and 14th Iowa were on his right. Unlike the 2d Iowa, which surged to the assault in line of battle, these four units marched by the left flank. The sharpshooters of the 14th Missouri guarded Lauman's flanks.⁶⁵

Crossing the small stream at the bottom of the hollow, the Iowans encountered a rail fence. It took the brawny Iowans only a few seconds to throw down the fence. Urged on by their popular colonel, the Hawkeyes began to ascend the opposite slope, the crest of which was crowned by the Confederate rifle pits. "Steady, boys!" shouted Tuttle.

"Steady, boys!" the officers repeated.

The Iowans now entered the abatis which fronted the Rebel earthworks. Although no one gave the order, the regiment quickened its pace. Scrambling over felled timber and through brush, the grim Hawkeyes pushed steadily up the hill, their fixed bayonets glistening.⁶⁶

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 344-345, 348, 350, 354, 357.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 228-229; *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 10; *Source Book* 935, 971.

⁶⁵ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. VII, 228, 231-232; *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. LII, pt. II, 10; *Source Book*, 935.

⁶⁶ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. VII, 229; *Source Book*, 935; Bell, *Tramps & Triumphs*, 9-10; Twombly *2d Iowa at Fort Donelson*, 16.

On the Hawkeyes' left and right, the supporting regiments waded the small watercourse and entered the abatis. When their colors reached the bottom of the hollow, two of the four regimental commanders sent their men up the opposite slope in columns of battalions. After crossing the stream, Colonel Veatch halted his lead battalion, pending the arrival of the other. As soon as his second battalion came up, the colonel formed his unit, the 25th Indiana, into line of battle. The regiment started up the hill on the run. The commander of the 14th Iowa, Colonel William T. Shaw, deployed his left battalion into line of battle. His right battalion marched up the left flank.⁶⁷

Observing the Union buildup on the opposite ridge, Major Turner, whose small command of three companies was charged with the defense of the detached rifle pits, shouted for his officers "to keep a careful watch." A little after 2 p.m. Captain Carson informed the major "that the Federals were moving on the works in large numbers." Mounting his horse, Turner rode to his left. Here, there was a commanding knoll from which he could survey the entire area. From this point, the major "could see the enemy in two lines, and numbering several thousand, moving rapidly upon us." Rejoining his small command, Turner ordered his troops into position. He admonished his soldiers "to hold their fire until the enemy were at close range."

At this moment, Turner was cheered to see the advance elements of Colonel Hanson's crack 2d Kentucky rapidly approaching. Galloping toward the oncoming reinforcements, Turner hailed Hanson who was riding with his regiment's van, and asked for help. Without taking time to reply, Hanson bellowed out the command "double-quick time march!" But, by the time Hanson's gasping infantrymen reached the point of danger, the Federals had driven their attack home.⁶⁸

The left battalion of the 2d Iowa, with Tuttle at its head, surged rapidly forward "in unbroken line," without firing a shot. Not until the Hawkeyes had driven to within 20 paces of the rifle pits, held by Turner's Tennesseans, did they encounter any small-arms fire. Captain Newsham, who was rid-

⁶⁷ O.R., Series I, Vol. VII, 232; *Source Book*, 935.

⁶⁸ O.R., Series I, Vol. VII, 333, 344, 378; *Source Book*, 674-675.

ing at General Smith's side, recalled that when the butternuts did open fire, it was with "double barreled shot guns loaded with buckshot."⁶⁹

Apparently, the Confederates had aimed too high. The volley passed over the Iowans' heads "cutting twigs and limbs off the trees." Letting go with a mighty shout the Hawkeyes surged ahead.

Private Bell recalled:

I feel myself crowded off to the right and hear my comrade on the left exclaim, "Howell, what are you doing here?" and turn to find that George Howell is crowding forward into the front rank. For an instant I see him, a round, red spot in his forehead and he falls dead, as a bullet crashes through his brain. Our captain, [John S.] Slaymaker, falls, and as some of the boys stop to help him he cries, "Go on! go on! don't stop for me," and never speaks again. The first lieutenant [William F. Holmes] drops with a dreadful wound in the leg; the second lieutenant [Loren W. Pierce] is wounded; Harry Doolittle, the color-bearer, receives four wounds instantaneously and the flag is stretched upon the ground; it is raised by Corporal [Solomon G.] Page who is shot dead; Corporal [James H.] Churcher then takes the colors and has his arm broken and is succeeded by Corporal Twombly, who is knocked down by a spent ball but jumps up and carries the colors to the close of the engagement.⁷⁰

Large gaps were ripped in Tuttle's initial assault wave by this point-blank fire. But it was like trying to sweep back the tide with a broom as the Iowans closed in for the kill. As soon as he reached the open ground in front of the Rebel rifle pits, Tuttle shouted, "Right over boys!" With a cheer, the Hawkeyes poured over the works and found that most of Turner's men had taken to their heels. The few Tennesseans who remained behind "were promptly put to the bayonet."⁷¹

Having scored a breakthrough, Tuttle ordered his soldiers to blaze away at the fleeing Tennesseans. The Iowans responded to this command with enthusiasm. Several volleys had been discharged into the fleeing greyclads before Colonel

⁶⁹ O.R., Series I, Vol. VII, 228-229; O.R., Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 8. *Source Book*, 935.

⁷⁰ Bell, *Tramps & Triumphs*, 10.

⁷¹ Twombly, *2d Iowa at Fort Donelson*, 16; O.R., Series I, Vol. VII, 228-229; O.R., Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 8; *Source Book*, 935.

Baker's panting battalion, headed by General Smith, reached the captured works. Company B, 25th Indiana had kept abreast of Tuttle's wing. The Hoosiers gained the rifle pits a little to the right of the Hawkeyes' point of penetration. Even before the Iowans had caught their second wind, General Smith, in hopes of exploiting his success, called upon Tuttle to redeploy his regiment and press on. In accordance with the general's instructions, Tuttle quickly reformed the 2d Iowa into line of battle.⁷²

The other units of Lauman's attacking brigade reached the captured rifle pits close on the Iowan's heels. On Tuttle's left, the 2d Indiana came up. Because of the rugged terrain over which the regiment had advanced, and the "want of tactical" know-how demonstrated by the officers of the recently organized regiment, the Hoosiers reached the Confederate works in "confusion." Nevertheless, Smith ordered the Indianians to support the 2d Iowa as the Hawkeyes pressed after the fleeing Tennesseans.⁷³

The 25th Indiana, after having been deployed into line of battle, had veered to the left. The regiment, except for Company B, entered the Rebels' works at the point where the 2d Iowa had planted its colors. Upon gaining the earthworks, the regiment was instructed by General Smith to support the advance of the 2d Iowa.⁷⁴ To the Hoosiers' right, the 7th and 14th Iowa entered the entrenchments. Apparently only one of these regiments, the 7th Iowa, pressed after the retreating Confederates. By the time these two regiments reached the abandoned rifle pits, Porter's Tennessee Battery had commenced to hammer the area with canister and shell. In addition, the infantrymen of the 18th Tennessee, from their position atop a commanding knoll several hundred yards southwest of the breakthrough, had opened fire on the two Iowa regiments. General Smith was afraid that this might foreshadow a Rebel counterattack on the exposed right flank of Lauman's brigade. The general accordingly directed the commander of the 14th Iowa, Colonel Shaw, to have his unit hold and defend the western portion of the captured rifle

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 9.

⁷⁴ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. VII, 228.

pits.⁷⁵ The 14th Missouri continued to cover the flanks of Lauman's brigade.

As soon as the rifle pits were secured, General Smith called for Captain Newsham. The general ordered the captain to hasten to the rear and bring forward a section of artillery. These guns would be emplaced in the captured works. From this vantage point, the field pieces would be used to support the attack on the new line of resistance which the Confederates were frantically seeking to establish on the next ridge, 400 yards to the east. Hurrying to the rear, Captain Newsham quickly contacted the officer in charge of Battery K, Captain George H. Stone.

The captain, on being advised that artillery was needed at the front, issued marching orders to Lieutenant John O'Connell's section. In spite of the difficult terrain, O'Connell's gunners succeeded in bringing their two 10-pounder Parrotts forward. Gaining the captured position, the Missourians quickly unlimbered their pieces and opened fire. After the artillerists had placed their Parrotts in battery, Colonel Shaw

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 231-232; *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 9-10. Lew Wallace in his article published in *Battles and Leaders* wrote of the attack in highly colored terms:

Taking Lauman's brigade, General Smith began the advance. They were under fire instantly. The guns in the fort joined in with the infantry who were at the time in the rifle-pits, the great body of the Confederate right wing being with General Buckner. The defense was greatly favored by the ground, which subjected the assailants to a double fire from the beginning of the abatis. The men have said that "it looked too thick for a rabbit to get through." General Smith, on his horse, took position in the front and center of the line. Occasionally he turned in the saddle to see how the alignment was kept. For the most part, however, he held his face steadily toward the enemy. He was, of course, a conspicuous object for the sharp-shooters in the rifle-pits. The air around him twittered with minie-bullets. Erect as if on review, he rode on timing the gait of his horse with the movement of his colors. A soldier said: "I was nearly scared to death, but I saw the old man's white mustache over his shoulder, and went on."

On to the abatis the regiments moved without hesitation, leaving a trail of dead and wounded behind. There the fire seemed to get trebly hot, and there some of the men halted, where upon, seeing the hesitation, General Smith put his cap on the point of his sword, held it aloft, and called out, "No flinching now, my lads?—Here—this is the way! Come on!" He picked a path through the jagged limbs of the trees holding his cap all the time in sight; and the effect was magical. The men swarmed in after him, and got through in the best order they could—not all of them, alas! On the other side of the obstruction they took the semblance of re-formation and

redeployed his regiment, the 14th Iowa. Shaw did this with a two-fold objective in mind; to get his troops under cover and to furnish support to the cannoneers.⁷⁶

* * *

When their volleys failed to check Tuttle's hard-hitting Iowans, a number of Turner's men abandoned their comrades and drifted to the rear. A large portion of Captain Carson's and Sample's companies grimly held their ground. These soldiers contested "the ground with a courage," Major Turner had "never seen surpassed." Overwhelmed by the Hawkeyes, the badly outnumbered Tennesseans, leaving behind their dead and seriously wounded, rapidly retreated across the deep hollow to the rear of their rifle pits. Reaching the crest of the opposite ridge 400 yards to the east, Major Turner rallied his three companies. Aided by Colonel Head who had hastened to the point of danger, Turner quickly deployed his troops behind the topographic crest of the ridge.⁷⁷

The Yankees had scored their breakthrough before Hanson's

charged in after their chief, who found himself then between the two fires. Up the ascent he rode; up they followed. At the last moment the keepers of the rifle-pits clambered out and fled. Wallace, "The Capture of Fort Donelson," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, I, 423.

All the "After Action Reports" submitted by the participants agree on one point; the left wing of the 2d Iowa, led by Colonel Tuttle spear-headed the Union attack. General Smith, Colonel Baker, and Captain Newsham rode at the head of the right battalion of the 2d Iowa, which followed Tuttle's wing. Furthermore, the Confederates held their fire until the Iowans had driven to within 20 paces of the rifle pits; while the Federals did not use their firearms until after they had crossed the earthworks.

The source for Wallace's account in *Battles and Leaders*. is probably the story submitted by the Missouri *Democrat's* correspondent datelined Fort Donelson, February 17, 1862. The reporter wrote:

The hills at the point are among the most precipitous of those upon which the enemy were posted. Selecting the Second and Seventh Iowa, the Fifty-second Indiana for the storming party, Gen. Smith deflected the main portion of his division to the right, and having succeeded in engaging the attention of the enemy at this point, himself headed the storming party and advanced upon the works from his extreme left. It was a most magnificent sight. Unappalled by the perfect storm of bullets which rained about him, the General on horseback, and with his hat on the point of his sword, preceded his troops, and inspired them with *furore* there was no withstanding. *Source Book*, 773-774.

⁷⁶ O.R., Series I, Vol. VII, 226, 232; O.R., Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 9, 13.

⁷⁷ *Source Book*, 674-675; O.R., Series I, Vol. VII, 378.

hard-fighting Kentuckians were able to reach the rifle pits. When the bluecoats continued to press the attack, they caught the Kentuckians before they were able to complete their deployment. Hanson's regiment was driven back "in confusion" upon the rifle pits held by the 18th Tennessee. Here, Hanson, assisted by General Buckner, was able to rally his Kentuckians. Indeed, the Kentuckians had been thrown into such disorder that the two officers, to rally and form them, "had to take at least twenty men by the shoulders and pull them into line as a nucleus for formation."⁷⁸

Buckner and Hanson had barely finished rallying the 2d Kentucky when Colonel Head rode up. Head quickly briefed the general on the desperate turn of events in his sector. Preparatory to bending his efforts to organize a new defense line, Buckner sent several of his staff officers to hurry reinforcements (both infantry and artillery) to the scene of the Union penetration. Next, the general, aided by a number of officers, hastily laid out a new line of resistance. Buckner's new line was located behind the topographic crest of the ridge and overlooked the spur where the detached works which the bluecoats had just captured were located. The Confederates knew this position would have to be held. If the Unionists were able to emplace batteries on this ridge, they would make the Water Batteries and fort untenable.⁷⁹

Colonel Head saw that the severe morning's fighting had "greatly exhausted" Buckner's command. He decided it would be a good idea if he committed a portion of the fort's garrison. A messenger was sent galloping to the fort with instructions for Colonel James E. Bailey to hurry the 49th Tennessee to Buckner's support. Moving out of the fort on the double, the 49th Tennessee, 300 strong, quickly covered the 800 yards which separated it from the point of danger where Buckner's new line was being formed. Colonel Bailey immediately deployed his regiment on the right of Turner's detachment. The 49th Tennessee had reached the front at a critical moment. As the soldiers dashed into position, they saw that the Union skirmishers (probably the 14th Missouri) had already crossed the ravine, and were nearly one-third of the way up the ridge.

⁷⁸ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. VII, 294, 333, 344.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 333, 378.

Bailey's men opened a scathing fire on the advancing blue-coats.⁸⁰

Besides ordering out the 49th Tennessee, Colonel Head sought to strengthen Major Turner's detachment. Two companies of the 30th Tennessee had been manning the fortifications in the vicinity of the southwest salient angle. Following the return of Buckner's command, these two units found themselves unemployed. Advised of this situation, Head sent them to reinforce Major Turner. With the addition of these two companies, Turner found his command increased to a battalion. Four other companies, belonging to the 30th Tennessee, continued to occupy their battle stations in the rifle pits between the salient angle and Indian Creek.⁸¹

Two of the three guns emplaced in the fort also opened fire on the attacking Federals. Finding that no gunboats were in range, Captain Reuben R. Ross left the Upper Battery. Accompanied by Ordnance Sergeant Stone and several other men attached to his battery, Ross took charge of one of the two nine-pounders emplaced in the fort. With this piece, the artilleryists "played on the enemy's land forces over the head" of their comrades, with what effect Ross "could not tell." Simultaneously, the crew manning the eight-inch siege howitzer commanded by Lieutenant P. K. Stankiewicz opened fire. Apparently, the siege gun was served with good effect, be-

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 378, 391-392. Lieutenant Colonel Alfred Robb was mortally wounded at this time. The 49th Tennessee's historian, Polk C. Johnson, recalled:

No braver or better soldier ever died. He [Robb] went into the battle upon a large white horse, and being himself a very large man, was a fine target for the sharpshooters. He was shot through the breast by one of these, and when shot put his hand to his breast, and saying he was shot, started to the rear. Several men followed him, and he would have fallen from his horse in fifty yards, but for their assistance. The men managed to get him to his quarters. During the night he was carried to the boats at Dover to be sent to Clarksville with the other wounded. Two boats were at the wharf, one fastened to the bank, and the other on the side of this boat. He was placed on the first boat to be carried through to the second; in crossing from the one boat to the other the boats separated—the men holding his legs let loose and his body fell into the river, and he would have been drowned had it not been for his faithful old colored servant (Uncle Abram Robb) who, holding his arms, pulled him into the boat. He died at his home February 17, 1862. *Source Book*, 1371-1372.

⁸¹ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. VII, 378.

cause the guns spotters reported the shells falling into the target area.⁸²

The five regiments of Colonel Brown's brigade were charged with the defense of the sector of the perimeter extending from the right flank of the 18th Tennessee to the knoll overlooking Indian Creek. Brown's troops had scarcely settled into position, before an excited staff officer galloped up to the colonel's command post. The aide informed Brown that Buckner needed both infantry and artillery to contain the Union breakthrough. Without a moment's hesitation, Colonel Brown issued orders for the 14th Mississippi, the 3d Tennessee, and a section of Graves' Kentucky Battery to hurry to Beckner's support.⁸³

The rugged Mississippians, who had just reoccupied their position in support of Porter's six guns, moved off on the double, closely followed by the 3d Tennessee. These two regiments dashed up at a most opportune moment, because at this time the Federals had pressed forward in a determined effort to crush the Rebels' reorganized defense line. Buckner used these two regiments to plug a gap in his line which existed between the 2d Kentucky's right and the left of Turner's battalion. The Mississippians were deployed to the right, the Tennesseans to the left. The section of Graves' battery which Brown had sent in response to Buckner's call also came thundering up. In accordance with Buckner's instructions, the cannoneers unlimbered their two pieces. The guns were mounted in the emplacement which had been constructed at the intersection of the new and old defense lines. From this position, Graves' artillerists could enfilade the Federals' right flank as they moved against Buckner's line.⁸⁴

When Generals Floyd and Pillow were advised that the Yankees had secured a lodgement within Buckner's lines, they ordered the 42d Tennessee, Colonel William A. Quarles commanding, to the support of the right wing. Quarles' unit, at the time it received its marching orders, was stationed between Erin Hollow and the Wynn's Ferry road. Cold and benumbed

⁸² *Ibid.*, 401.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 333, 348-349.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 333, 345, 348-349, 350-351.

as they were, Quarles' Tennesseans moved off on the double-quick through the "mud, sleet, ice and snow."⁸⁵

* * *

Observing that Lauman's troops had seized the rifle pits flanking the Eddyville road, Colonel Cook determined to get permission to commit his brigade. Since General Smith had accompanied the attacking force, he was not readily available. Cook accordingly realized he would have to obtain the necessary sanction from General Grant. A staff officer was sent to contact Grant and secure the general's permission. Furthermore, Cook wished to attack and capture the enemy's batteries, Porter's and Graves', which had started to rake Lauman's command with canister and shell. While awaiting the return of his messenger, Cook received information indicating the "Stars and Stripes" had been planted on the portion of the Confederate works occupied by Porter's battery. This favorable news caused Cook to order his men to hold their fire. Next, Cook sought to verify the reported capture of Porter's position. At the same time, Cook ordered his skirmishers to rejoin their parent units. Within a few minutes, Cook was able to ascertain the "Stars and Stripes" had been raised by the Rebels as a ruse in an effort to decoy the bluecoats into an ambush.⁸⁶

Shortly thereafter, the staff officer returned with Grant's approval of Cook's proposal to move to Lauman's support. Colonel Cook then ordered his brigade forward. By this time, the 7th Illinois had reached the front and had taken position on the right of the 50th Illinois. In column of battalion, by the left flank, Cook's three attacking regiments, the 12th Iowa on the left, the 50th Illinois in the center, and the 7th Illinois on the right, swept forward on the double. Surging down off the ridge which served as their point of departure, Cook's troops crossed the small stream at the bottom. They then began to ascend the abatis-covered opposite slope. Cook's regiments advanced against the left flank of the detached line of rifle pits captured by Lauman's brigade. Therefore, they received no frontal fire. Porter's guns, which were emplaced in the perimeter's southwestern salient angle, were

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 370-371.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.

able to enfilade the right flank of the attacking columns. Fortunately for the Yankees, the beaten zone was limited; the grey-clad gunners consistently overshot their targets. In his "After Action Report," Colonel Cook observed, "The distance being short, the discharges caused but little damage, overshooting us just enough to tear into shreds the colors of the Seventh Illinois . . ." Cook's troops entered the detached earthworks to the right of where Lauman's brigade had scored its breakthrough. Taking position in the rifle pits, Cook's three regiments prepared to cover Lauman's troops.⁸⁷

* * *

In the meantime, Lauman's brigade, spearheaded by the 2d Iowa, had resumed the advance. Pressing eagerly forward in line of battle, Tuttle's Hawkeyes, their flanks covered by sharpshooters of the 14th Missouri, reached the bottom of the ravine. The Iowans and Missourians began to claw their way up the ridge, on top of which the butternuts had re-formed their lines. In the face of a galling fire, the grim bluecoats slowly worked their way forward. Before Tuttle's troops were able to reach the crest of the ridge, the greycalds checked their advance. When his men were unable to move any farther in the face of the constantly impacting resistance, Tuttle ordered them to lie down. Hitting the ground, the Iowans returned the Confederates' fire.⁸⁸

On Tuttle's left, the 52d Indiana moved cautiously forward. Evidently, the regimental officers had been unable to reorganize their unit which had reached the rifle pits in "confusion." A large number of the Hoosiers refused to advance. Instead of accompanying their comrades, these people took cover in the earthworks. From the rifle pits the Indianians blazed away at the Confederates on the opposite ridge. The range, however, was too great. The recently recruited Hoosiers' volleys fell short. At this time, the 2d Iowa was pinned down in front of the Confederates' position. Unfortunately for themselves, the Hawkeyes were within range of the Indianians' small-arms. Consequently, the Iowans suffered severely as a

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 221, 223; Reed, *Campaigns and Battles of the 12th Iowa*, 19-20. During the advance through the abatis, the 12th Iowa suffered 8 or 10 casualties, all wounded.

⁸⁸ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VII, 229.

result of the "trigger happy" Hoosiers' fire. Colonel Tuttle in his "After Action Report" caustically commented:

In the mean time the enemy were being re-enforced, and one of our regiment poured a disastrous fire upon us in the rear . . . I am not able to name the regiment which fired upon our rear, but I do know that the greater part of the casualties we received at that point was from that source, for I myself saw some of my men fall who I know were shot from the hill behind us.

Dashing up to the rifle pits where the Indianians had ensconced themselves, General Smith put a stop to this haphazard firing. Before riding over to another section of the front, General Smith directed the Hoosiers to remain where they were.⁸⁹

A portion of the 52d Indiana, supported on the left by a battalion of the 14th Missouri, had continued the advance in compliance with Smith's instructions. Reaching the bottom of the hollow, these two units began to ascend the western slope. Like the 2d Iowa, to their right, the Hoosiers' and Missourians' quickly found their progress checked by the hard-fighting Confederates.

The 25th Indiana and the 7th Iowa, screened by the other battalion of the 14th Missouri, supported the 2d Iowa's attack on the right. Descending the steep slope, the officers in charge of the two regiments found that their battle lines had become "somewhat broken." At the bottom of the ravine, they halted their units while the men dressed ranks. Before the advance could be renewed, the 2d Iowa had started to retire. To cover the Hawkeyes' retreat, the 25th Indiana and 7th Iowa grimly held their ground in the bottom of the hollow.⁹⁰

The Confederate infantry, ably supported by Porter's and a section of Graves' batteries, had easily checked the Federals' attempt to exploit their initial success. An examination of the "After Action Reports" reveals that only one Union regiment, the 2d Iowa, made a determined effort to reach Buckner's reorganized line of resistance. Tuttle's Hawkeyes were stopped short of the Rebel line, however. After lying down, the Iowans continued to bang away at the butternuts "for over an hour." Only when he was informed that his men had exhausted their ammunition did Tuttle order them to fall back.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 229-230; O.R., Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 9.

⁹⁰ O.R., Series I, Vol. VII, 228, 231.

Tuttle was able to disengage his unit without any interference on the part of the greyclads. The Iowans fell back in good order despite the heavy losses suffered in the attack—41 killed, and 157 wounded.⁹¹

* * *

Before the retreat of the 2d Iowa, additional Confederate units reached the point of danger. The 42d Tennessee came up on the double. Buckner used this regiment to plug a weak spot in his reorganized front between the 2d Kentucky's right and the left of the 3d Tennessee. To help contain the Union penetration, Colonel Head decided to order additional troops from his brigade into action. The colonel sent a messenger to the fort with a dispatch for Colonel Cyrus A. Sugg, who had been left in charge of the garrison upon Colonel Bailey's departure. Sugg was directed to have part of his regiment—the 50th Tennessee—reinforce Buckner. Leaving Lieutenant Colonel Harrison C. Lockhart in command at the fort, Sugg, accompanied by one battalion, moved out on the double. Arriving at the front, Sugg deployed his battalion on the right of the 49th Tennessee. The newcomers were used to anchor the right flank of Buckner's new defense line.⁹²

Having succeeded in concentrating six regiments (the 2d Kentucky, the 14th Mississippi, the 3d, 18th, 42d, and 49th Tennessee) and two battalions (Turner's and Sugg's), supported by artillery, along a line which Colonel Hanson pronounced stronger "than the one lost," the Confederates checked the Union advance.⁹³ In fact, the Yankees were unable to hold all the ground gained, in the face of the tremendous firepower displayed by the Confederates. Grudgingly giving ground, the bluecoats retired across the hollow, taking cover in the captured rifle pits. Buckner, however, failed to launch a counterattack. The butternuts were denied the chance of exploiting this Federal set back. The reason for this failure can be attributed to two factors; first, Buckner had overestimated the strength of the attacking Union force, and, second, most of the Confederate troops involved were completely exhausted. All of Buckner's infantry and artillery, except the 49th Tennessee and the two battalions (Sugg's and Turner's),

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 229-230; O.R., Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 11.

⁹²O.R., Series I, Vol. VII, 371, 378, 392.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 344.

had participated in the morning's attack on the Union right. In his "After Action Report," Major Nat. F. Cheairs, commanding the 3d Tennessee, noted, "Notwithstanding they [his men] were completely (or nearly so) worn down by incessant fighting and fatigue duty for eight consecutive days, we succeeded in driving back the enemy, although they had fresh and we had exhausted troops."⁹⁴

The Rebel artillery (Porter's battery, a section of Graves' unit, and the guns of the fort manned by Ross' and Stankieuriz's detachments) blasted the oncoming Unionists with canister, shot, and shell. Lieutenant John W. Morton of Porter's battery dramatically described the Union attack:

Bailey's, Sugg's and Quarles' regiments very soon reinforced this new line, and one section of Graves' battery, under the personal direction of the heroic Graves took position at the intersection of the new with the old lines, and as usual was most conspicuous for its effective work. Morton's section of Porter's battery, which had been delayed in reaching its former position, was promptly thrown into action to the left of Graves, under a heavy fire. The horses were shot down and the guns run into place by hand. Until dark the desperate conflict raged. Lieutenant [Leverett] Hutchison, of Porter's battery, was severely shot through the neck. Lieut. [W. R.] Culbertson of the same battery, was hit; and the gallant Capt. Thomas K. Porter, who, Hanson said, "always directed his guns at the right time and to the right place," was disabled by a severe and dangerous wound, and was borne from the field. Capt. Porter's marked coolness and dash, and the efficient and intelligent manner in which he handled his guns, elicited the unbounded admiration of all who saw him. While being carried bleeding from the field, he said to me, "Don't let them have the guns Morton."

I replied, "No, Captain; not while I have one man left," little mindful that my apprehensions would be so nearly carried out. The cannoners had been greatly reduced by frost-bites, wounds and deaths, until toward the close of this engagement I had only three men left at one gun. One of these was wounded and left where he fell, we being unable to remove him at the moment. Pat Kine, acting number one, who was always at his post, seeing the dead and wounded lying thick around us, impelled by that generous and gallant nature and impulsive disposition so characteristic of the Irish race, threw himself in front

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 333, 351.

of me saying: "Lieutenant, Lieutenant, get lower down the hill, or they will kill you;" and actually embraced me as if to make a shield of himself to the enemy's bullets for my protection.

I replied: "Uo, Pat; let us give them one more round." He promptly seized his ramming staff and while in the act of driving the charge home, was shot through the heart and dropped underneath his gun. Night soon closed the bloody combat.⁹⁵

Both General Buckner and Colonel Brown in their "After Action Reports" paid tribute to the role of the artillery in checking the Yankees' advance. The general recalled:

During a contest of more than two hours the enemy threatened my left with a heavy column and made repeated attempts to storm my line on the right, but the well-directed fire of Porter's and Graves' artillery and the musketry fire of the infantry repelled the attempts and finally drove him to seek shelter behind the works he had taken and amid the irregularities of the ground.⁹⁶

Colonel Brown cited the artillery's accomplishments in stronger terms:

Captains Porter and Graves did efficient service in the engagement with their batteries; indeed they excited the admiration of the whole command by an exhibition of coolness and bravery under a heavy fire, from which they had no protection, which could not be excelled. Captain Porter fell dangerously wounded by a Minie ball through his thigh while working one of his guns, his gunners being nearly all of them disabled or killed. The command then devolved upon Lieutenant Morton, a beardless youth, who stepped forward like an old veteran, and nobly did he emulate the example of his brave captain.⁹⁷

* * *

Rebuffed in their attempt to crack Buckner's defense line, the hard-fighting infantrymen of the 2d Iowa and the 14th Missouri retired into the captured rifle pits. From the pro-

⁹⁵ *Source Book*, 1357-1358.

⁹⁶ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. VII, 333.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 349. Lieutenant Morton reported:

Porter's battery, from its active participation in the four-days' conflict, its advanced and exposed position, lost eight men killed outright and twenty-five wounded, making a total in killed and wounded of thirty-three out of forty-eight officers and men engaged actively at the guns. The remainder of the company were drivers, teamsters, and artificers, and, with the horses, were protected in a ravine some distance from the battery. *Source Book*, 1358.

tection afforded by these earthworks, the bluecoats returned the Confederates' fire. Shortly after his Iowans had regained the works, Colonel Tuttle was injured when a projectile from one of the Confederate cannons struck the log on which he was standing. The impact knocked the colonel to the ground, injuring his back and spraining his wrist. With Colonel Tuttle out of action, Colonel Baker assumed command of the regiment.⁹⁸ The 25th Indiana and the 7th Iowa held their position in the bottom of the ravine until after the 2d Iowa and the 14th Missouri had reached the rifle pits. Having successfully covered their comrades' retreat, the Hawkeyes and Hoosiers, keeping their faces toward the foe, slowly retraced their steps. Reaching the earthworks, these two regiments took position on the right of the 2d Iowa. Mustering his unit, the 25th Indiana, Colonel Veatch found the attack had cost his command 40 men, all wounded.⁹⁹

After his division had failed to carry the Confederates' reorganized main line of resistance, General Smith ordered his brigade commanders, Lauman and Cook, to hold the captured rifle pits. As soon as Lauman's troops had fallen back into the earthworks they were redeployed from left to right: the 2d Iowa, the 25th Indiana, the 7th Iowa, the 14th Missouri, and the 14th Iowa. Colonel Shaw's 14th Iowa continued to support Lieutenant O'Connell's two 10-pounder Parrotts. The hapless 52d Indiana was pulled out of the line by General Smith. Once Colonel James M. Smith had mustered and re-formed his regiment, he rejoined his parent brigade, Cook's.¹⁰⁰

When Captain Newsham reached the front with Lieutenant O'Connell's Parrotts, General Smith told him that "the guns were too light." The general urged the staff officer to procure some heavier ordnance. Returning to the Ridge road, Captain Newsham encountered Battery H, 1st Missouri Light Artillery. At this time, the Missouri artillerists were en route from the Union right. The battery was under orders to furnish fire support to Smith's command. Hailing the battery

⁹⁸ O.R., Series I, Vol. VII, 229-230; *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers in the War of the Rebellion*, Vol. I, 98.

⁹⁹ O.R., Series I, Vol. VII, 228, 231.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 221; O.R., Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 9; Twombly, *2d Iowa at Fort Donelson*, 16.

commander, Captain Welker, Newsham directed him to report to General Smith. Following the receipt of these instructions, the cannoneers eased their three guns (two 20-pounders and one 10-pounder Parrott rifles) cautiously off the ridge where Smith's division had formed before the attack. Gaining the Eddyville road, the gunners drove their teams up the opposite slope. Reaching the rifle pits, Captain Welker's cannoneers unlimbered their three pieces on the left of O'Connell's section. Their guns placed in battery, the Missourians began to trade shots with the Confederate field pieces emplaced on the opposite side of the hollow. During the ensuing duel, O'Connell's section beat Welker's gunners to the punch and dismounted one of the butternuts' guns.¹⁰¹

Colonel Cook's brigade occupied the section of the captured earthworks on Lauman's right. Shortly before the 2d Iowa was compelled to give way, General Smith had ridden up to Colonel Babcock's command post. Evidently, the general had witnessed the advance of the 7th Illinois. As Historian Ambrose remembered, the general called to Colonel Babcock:

I never saw a regiment make such grand movements under such a fire in all my military life as your's has just made. Colonel, I thank God for your command at this moment. Charge that rebel battery! charge it with your steel and silence its work of death!

Accordingly, Colonel Babcock hastily formed his regiment into line of battle. But before the colonel could lead his men in an attack on Porter's battery, the general glanced toward the west. Observing that the sun was about to drop below the horizon, General Smith turned to Babcock and remarked, "I countermand the order given you to charge that battery. It is now too late; I will leave that work for you to do tomorrow."¹⁰²

In addition to the 52d Indiana, the 13th Missouri, which had been supporting the four guns emplaced on the ridge southwest of the Poor house, was also directed to report to Colonel Cook. By dusk, the Missourians had rejoined Cook's brigade. The rifle pits occupied by Cook's command were not extensive. To keep from crowding his men into a limited

¹⁰¹ *Source Book*, 936; *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. VII, 226; *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 9, 13.

¹⁰² *Source Book*, 1009.

space, Cook decided to hold a portion of his brigade in reserve. The three regiments already ensconced in the earthworks—the 7th and 50th Illinois, and the 12th Iowa—would remain where they were, while the 52d Indiana and the 13th Missouri spent the night on the timber-strewn western slope of the ridge.¹⁰³

Before returning to the front after contacting Battery H, Captain Newsham encountered General Grant. The general asked Newsham if "Smith wanted anything." Without having been given the authority by General Smith, the captain replied that the general "wanted some of his old regiments." Without a moment's hesitation Grant issued instructions for Captain Rawlins to proceed to the right flank of the army. On his arrival in that area Rawlins was to order Colonel John McArthur's brigade to report to General Smith.¹⁰⁴

McArthur's brigade had been badly battered during the Confederate attack on the Union right. The brigade had been withdrawn into the upper reaches of Bufford Hollow. Here the troops had halted. The rolls were called and the command supplied with rations and ammunition. By 4 p.m. when Rawlins rode up, these tasks had been completed. McArthur was ready to redeploy his brigade. After Rawlins had explained Grant's order to McArthur, the brigade moved out—the 12th Illinois in the van. Darkness had fallen and the day's fighting had ceased by the time McArthur's hard-marching troops reached the hollow south of James Crisp's house.

Before proceeding any farther, McArthur stopped his command. A staff officer was sent to acquaint General Smith with the brigade's arrival. The aide soon returned with the necessary instructions. McArthur was directed to send one of his regiments to the front; the other two would constitute Smith's strategic reserve and camp in the hollow. McArthur assigned to the 12th Illinois the mission of bolstering Smith's main line of resistance.

Greatly hindered by the darkness, the Illinoisans scaled the abatis-covered slope and gained the captured rifle pits. When the 12th Illinois reported to General Smith, he ordered the unit into position on the left of the 2d Iowa. After the unit

¹⁰³ O.R., Series I, Vol. VII, 221-222, 224; Reed, *Campaigns and Battles of the 12th Iowa*, 20.

¹⁰⁴ *Source Book*, 936.

had completed its deployment, Welker's cannoneers shifted their three Parrott rifles into the regiment's sector. McArthur's two other regiments—the 9th and 41st Illinois—spent the night in the ravine.¹⁰⁵

Colonel W. H. L. Wallace's brigade, like McArthur's, had been hurled back by the powerful Rebel onslaught on the Union right. After being reorganized and replenishing their ammunition in Bufford Hollow, Wallace's troops were again deployed into line of battle. Taking position on the right of Thayer's brigade, Wallace's bluecoats had helped check the Rebels' advance. Once the greyclads had begun to retire into their earthworks, Wallace received a message from Grant. According to these instructions, Wallace was to move his brigade to the left "so as to be within easy supporting distance of either wing" of the army. Quickly assembling his command, Wallace proceeded to implement the general's orders. Crossing the valley of Indian Creek, Wallace's troops took position on the ridge southwest of the Poor house. It was on this ridge that Lew Wallace had formed his division less than 12 hours before.¹⁰⁶

The section of guns belonging to Battery D, 1st Missouri Light Artillery, which had been ordered to the Wynn's Ferry road sector during the afternoon, was also directed to rejoin General Smith. Without having fired a single projectile, the Missourians retraced their steps, camping for the night near the Ridge road.¹⁰⁷

* * *

The presence of W.H.L. Wallace's troops served to alarm the Confederates. They were afraid the Yankee generals were going to use these men to launch an attack on the sector of the Fort Donelson perimeter between the southwestern salient angle and Indian Creek. At this time, (just before dark) these rifle pits were held by two regiments—the 32d and 41st Tennessee—and a battalion of the 30th Tennessee. In their "After Action Reports" both General Buckner and Colonel Edward C. Cook of the 32d Tennessee commented on Wallace's concentration. The general pointed out that "the enemy

¹⁰⁵ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. VII, 216-217; *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 12.

¹⁰⁶ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. VII, 196, 207.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 225.

threatened" his left, while Cook stated "the enemy appeared in large force in front of us and threatened to attack us, when night came on."¹⁰⁸

When the news of the Union breakthrough reached Confederate GHQ, General Floyd issued instructions for Colonel John M. Simonton's brigade to hasten to Buckner's aid. At the time these instructions reached Colonel Simonton's command post, his unit was reoccupying the rifle pits adjacent to the Forge road. The troops were ordered to fall in; the brigade moved off on the double. Before Simonton's men reached the point of danger, Buckner's troops had contained the Union penetration. Furthermore, Colonel Joseph Drake's command had been unable to check Lew Wallace's advance on the Confederate left. Consequently, Floyd countermanded his order to Simton. The now thoroughly confused troops of Simonton's brigade retraced their steps.¹⁰⁹

* * *

Once darkness had put a stop to the day's hostilities, General Smith inspected and approved the dispositions made by Cook and Lauman. In accordance with the general's instructions the brigade commanders had covered their respective fronts with a strong line of outposts. Before retiring to his headquarters on the opposite ridge, the general told Cook and Lauman "to hold the position obtained during the night and immediately prepare for a combined assault the following morning."¹¹⁰

Lauman told the general, "That we could hold it till doomsday."¹¹¹

Reaching the bottom of the hollow west of the captured rifle pits, Smith sighted "a regiment drawn up in line of battle with about 50 men with bandages on their arms and legs." Turning to Captain Newsham, the general inquired the regiment's designation. Newsham replied the 9th Illinois. Smith then asked "what those white bandages were on the men for?" The captain answered "they were on men who when they heard that *he* wanted them had left the field hospital and joined the regiment to do and die for him." By this time

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 333, 357.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 374.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 221-222; *Source Book*, 935.

¹¹¹ Twombly, *2d Iowa at Fort Donelson*, 16.

Smith and his staff had reached the right flank of the 9th Illinois. As Newsham recalled, "the grand old hero at once took off his cap and rode down the front of the regiment *bareheaded*. The officers and men stood silent until he had passed, and then a cheer from their full hearts broke forth that told him how they appreciated the mark of respect he had paid them."¹¹²

Reaching his field headquarters, Smith and his staff discovered their tents had been converted during their absence into hospitals. To provide a measure of comfort, the officers kindled a large campfire at "the foot of a white oak tree." After the Union officers had discussed the day's activities and the desperate work anticipated in the morning, they lay down in the snow and slept as best they could.¹¹³

Except for the sporadic exchanges on the picket line, the Union troops, occupying the captured rifle pits, spent a quiet night. The soldiers were compelled to remain under arms. It was bitterly cold and most of the soldiers had no blankets. They tried to build fires, "but as the light flashed up it drew the attention of the rebel artillery." The soldiers decided that they "preferred to risk freezing to death and extinguished the fires." During the early hours of darkness, the cries and groans of the wounded (both Union and Confederate) were heard as they called for the hospital stewards.¹¹⁴

Toward the close of the day's action on the Confederates' right, Generals Floyd and Pillow visited Buckner's command post. After inspecting and giving their approval to Buckner's dispositions, the two generals returned to their headquarters. Once darkness had put a stop to hostilities, Buckner called upon his regimental commanders for large working parties. These fatigue details were given the task of throwing up earthworks along Buckner's new defense line. The soldiers not assigned to work on the fortifications stood to their arms, in case the Yankees attempted a night attack.¹¹⁵

* * *

Frustrated in their efforts to cut their way out of the Fort

¹¹² *Source Book*, 937.

¹¹³ *Source Book*, 935, 937.

¹¹⁴ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. VII, 222, 230; Bell, *Tramps & Triumphs*, 10; Twombly, *2d Iowa at Fort Donelson*, 17.

¹¹⁵ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. VII, 333, 344, 349, 354.

Donelson perimeter, the Confederate leaders assembled in the Rice house during the night. After a heated discussion, the generals decided to ask Grant for terms. During the meeting, General Buckner argued that the capture of the rifle pits flanking the Eddyville road had made his position untenable. From the vantage point gained, Buckner believed the Federals would be able to launch a massive attack on his reorganized defense line and capture the Water Batteries. Buckner stated that he was confident the Yankees "will attack my lines by light, and I cannot hold them for half an hour."¹¹⁶

Since General Floyd refused to surrender himself to the Federals, he passed the command to Pillow, who in turn yielded it to Buckner. One other Confederate officer, Colonel Forrest, refused to give up. While Buckner was negotiating with Grant, these three officers escaped. Floyd and Forrest took their respective commands with them.

Grant refused to grant Buckner any terms. Consequently, the Confederates were forced to surrender unconditionally.

Since his brigade had spearheaded the assault on the Confederate rifle pits covering the Eddyville road, Colonel Lauman asked General Smith to let his troops have the honor of entering the works first. Smith agreed to Lauman's request, specifying that the 2d Iowa have the post of honor when the column marched. After receiving Smith's approval, Lauman quickly put his command into motion. With drums beating and colors flapping in the breeze, Lauman's brigade proudly moved off. The Eddyville road served as the line of march.

Entering the perimeter, the bluecoats saw the Confederates "drawn up in a line, with their arms in great heaps." Colonel Lauman thought the greyclads looked "quite woe-begone" as the victors swung rapidly along. When the 2d Iowa reached the fort, they planted their bullet riddled "colors upon the battlements beside the white of the enemy." After all of his men had entered the fort, Lauman permitted them to camp. Lauman would be in charge of the fort; his brigade would constitute its garrison.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 334.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 230; O.R., Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 10; *Source Book*, 914, 916; Bell, *Tramps & Triumphs*, 11.

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