

DESPERATE BATTLES SURVIVED BY YOUTH

Edited by EMORY H. ENGLISH

In the deadly hand-to-hand fighting in the Civil war, recounted in history and records of both Union and Confederate regiments and brigades, the battles at Shiloh, Vicksburg, Chickamagua, Gettysburg, and countless other sanguinary struggles, were widely known and long have had place in recitals of the utter courage of leaders and soldiers brave. But, there were innumerable minor encounters in the same tragic war, in which likewise were displayed the same intrepid fearlessness, disregard of individual safety, and splendid heroism. The engagement at Franklin, Tennessee, was one such, and the annals of the entire war do not disclose gréater sacrifice of life considering numbers engaged.

General Sherman had captured Atlanta after a grueling but brilliant campaign. Then came a period of relaxation, during which the Union engineers constructed new lines of fortifications, so that the city might be held by a small force, while troops were dispatched in pursuit of General Hood, and the railroad tracks and bridges along the route by which the army had come could be repaired. Then the Union army started upon its march to the sea. Sherman always insisted that this was "just a shift of base," to achieve other important results, not an essential act of war; and not to be compared with the great campaign between Chattanooga and Atlanta. After a maneuver to mislead Sherman, the army of Hood turned northward towards Tennessee,¹ and the Fourth Army Corps of the Union forces cut loose from Sherman and swung back to intercept Hood, whose reprisal raid was deeply feared in the north.

A youth in the Third Brigade of the Second Division of the Fourth Army Corps, who had served through the

¹The Army of Tennessee under General Hood, pursuing its march northward late in November and early in December, came upon the Federal forces under General Schofield at Franklin, and General Thomas at Nashville, Tennessee, where desperate battles were fought, until Hood's army was reduced to skeleton commands and forced to retreat.—Lieutenant General James Longstreet. C. S. A., in *From Manassas to Appomattox*.

Atlanta campaign, thus participated in the exhaustive fighting on the way back north at Columbia and Spring Hill, and the severe experience of the terrible battle at Franklin. These engagements occurred on the way to join General Thomas at Nashville, who there awaited Hood's expected appearance in Tennessee.² Years ago this young man wrote out this particular portion of his story of the crucial days of the war's last tragic year that ended in May 1865, and it is filed among the valuable manuscripts of the Iowa State Department of History and Archives.

ENLISTED WITH OLDER BROTHERS

Hobart Francis Rogers, then only a lad of fourteen years, whose home was at Des Plaines, Cook county, Illinois, enlisted on March 27, 1864, joining three older brothers already serving in the Union army. In after life he resided at Stuart and Valley Junction (now West Des Moines), Iowa, and was active in the Iowa National Guard organization, attaining rank of lieutenant colonel of the old Third regiment, was long in the employ of the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railway, as fireman and engineer, and later owned a shoe store in Valley Junction.

But, Sergeant Rogers tells his own story, thrilling and colorful, as well as eventful, for a lad hardly yet grown, which was secured by the late Curator Edgar R. Harlan. Here it is:

I was born in the township of Maine, in Cook county, state of Illinois, on March 8, 1850; lived with my parents, two sisters and three brothers, on a farm. When I was seven years of age we moved from the farm to the town of Des Plaines, Cook county, sixteen miles northwest of Chicago, and that was our home during the Civil war.

Two of my brothers enlisted in 1861, and the third in 1863. The regiment in which the two brothers were serving came home on veteran furlough to recruit March 1, 1864. I enlisted in the same company with my two brothers on March 27, 1864, (Co. G, 42nd

²After a month of bold maneuvering, the advance of Hood's army appeared on the 26th of October, at Decatur, on the south side of the Tennessee. It had been a time of perplexity to the Federal authorities and of intense alarm throughout the north. Hood had twice thrown his army between Sherman and the latter's base; had captured four garrisons, and destroyed thirty miles of railroad. His movements had been bold and brilliantly executed.—*Photographic History of the Civil War*, "Decisive Battles," by Francis Trevelyan Miller, Vol. III, p. 252.

Regiment, Illinois Volunteers), when I was fourteen years and nineteen days old; and on April 1st we started with our regiment, on its return to the front; entrained at Chicago for Nashville, Tennessee; marched from Nashville to Chattanooga; arrived there just in time to join General Sherman's army for the Atlanta campaign. We were assigned to the Third Brigade, Second Division, Fourth Army, and took part in all of the battles of that campaign, and in the capture of Atlanta.

When General Sherman started upon his march to the sea, the Fourth Army Corps, commanded by General Schofield, to which we belonged, with one division of the Twenty-third Corps and a division of cavalry, also a few batteries of field artillery, were detached, and sent back by rail to Bridgeport, Alabama, to head off the Confederate army of 60,000 men under General Hood, who had started north on a reprisal raid,³ when General Sherman started for the sea. Our little army of 18,000 had a hard job cut out for us to stop an army of 60,000 Confederate veterans.

We met them in battle at Columbia⁴ and Spring Hill, Tennessee, and were forced back to Franklin, Tennessee, where on November 30th was fought the most desperate battle of the war for the numbers engaged. Franklin is located in a bend of the Harpeth river, eighteen miles southwest of Nashville. The Harpeth although narrow is very deep. The Confederate cavalry had gotten in our rear and burned the bridges at this point. Therefore, we were compelled to make a stand and fight until the bridges could be repaired for our trains and troops to cross. Franklin was a small town in 1864, and our little army was badly worn, with scant rations, fighting by day and marching by night.⁵

³General Schofield learned of the movements of Hood. He knew that if the latter reached Columbia he could easily capture the garrison at that place and then be free to cross the river and cut him off from Thomas. The sleeping troops were quickly aroused and in an hour were making their way through the night to Columbia, twenty-one miles distant. * * * It was a race between the armies of Hood and Schofield for the crossing at Columbia. The weary, footsore Federals barely won, * * * and the little army was saved. The Union army entrenched itself for battle. Works were thrown up while the wagon trains were retreating beyond the river. But it was found impractical to hold the position. All during the night of the (November) 27th there was a steady stream of men, wagons and artillery passing to the north side of Duck river. Not until daylight did the rear guard burn the railroad bridge and scuttle the pontoon boats behind them.—*Ibid.*, pp. 254, 256.

* * * the columns of northern soldiers trudged along through a moonless night within a few rods of the resting Confederates. There was constant apprehension lest the southern army should fall upon the passing Federal army, but the officer who was ordered to block the Federal march made but a feeble and partial attack. Hood realized that he had lost the best opportunity of crushing Schofield that the campaign had offered, and deplored the failure most bitterly. Schofield reached Spring Hill about seven in the evening, the same hour the last company of his troops was leaving Columbia. All through the night the procession continued, as the long train wended its way in the darkness over the hills in the direction of Nashville. At daybreak, as the rear wagons safely passed, and the skirmishers were called in, the advance columns were reaching the outskirts of Franklin.

⁵Schofield had not expected to give battle at Franklin. He was hurrying his men to reach the protecting entrenchments of Nashville. But he would not be taken unawares. Though his men had marched and fought by turns for a week, by day and night, until they were on the point of exhaustion, yet the tired and hungry troops, before they had prepared their morning meal, laid down the mus-

THE BATTLE AT FRANKLIN

As fast as our troops arrived they were assigned to positions, and commenced throwing up earth works. The line was formed around the town in the shape of a horse shoe, from the river around to the river on the opposite side of the town. At four o'clock in the afternoon on November 30, 1864, when the battle commenced, we had a fairly good line of works completed. The battle raged from that time until midnight, the Confederates making thirteen desperate assaults and hand-to-hand fights occurred repeatedly.

Gen. Pat Cleburne's division of Cheatham's Corps of the Confederate army did not have a field officer left when the battle ended.⁶ General Cleburne, the division commander, his chief of staff, General Carter and all three of his brigade commanders, Generals Adams, Strahl and Granby, died leading their respective brigades in the desperate assaults on our lines. General Carter's body was found inside our lines in his own door yard. Not a colonel, a lieutenant colonel, nor a major was left in the three brigades. This I am quoting from a report of the battle by a Confederate officer who took part in it. Also he stated that the divisions finally were under the command of a captain. The day following the battle the Confederate losses were estimated at 10,000 men in killed, wounded and missing. The Union loss was about five thousand. The ditches on both sides of the works, from river around to river, were full of dead and wounded men, and the field for a half a mile in front of the works was thickly strewn with dead and wounded men and horses.

The battle of Franklin will never have its proper place in the

ket and took up the spade. Soon entrenchments stretched along on two sides of the town. Batteries of artillery were placed at the front and in the rear guarding the lines of probable attack. Into this protecting haven, the weary regiments one by one filed, until by noon the last one had safely found its way to the entrenched walls of Franklin. The wagon trains passed over the Harpeth river and the troops expected soon to follow. Even then, the Confederate vanguard was close at hand. * * * A concentrated roar of musketry burst forth and they were engulfed in the on-sweeping torrent. The Confederate ranks plunged on, and with tremendous momentum they rushed toward the works. * * * The weight of the oncoming mass of humanity broke through the first line of Federal infantry. The center of the Union front had been pierced. Colonel Opdyke of Wagner's Union division had brought his brigade within the lines and was ready for the emergency. Riding forward, emptying his revolver, then using it like a club in the hand-to-hand fight, finally dismounted and grasped a musket. The men fought like demons, in their desperate endeavor to stem the tide of gray. * * * The breach was closed and the day was all but won by the Federals. The re-captured guns now poured their charges of death into the shattered ranks of the gray. * * * But the courageous Southerners were not to be thus outdone. The clouds of smoke had hardly cleared from the field when they again took up the gage of battle. In sheer desperation and with appalling recklessness of life, they thrust themselves upon the Union lines again and again, only to recoil, battered and bleeding. Evening fell upon the battling hosts, and long into the night there was heard the sharp volleys of musketry. Thus closed one of the fiercest of the minor struggles of the Civil war. At midnight Schofield withdrew from the trenches of Franklin and fell back to Thomas at Nashville.—*Ibid.*, pp. 260, 262, 264.

⁶Many gallant Southern leaders fell on the battlefield of Franklin, whose loss to the Confederacy was irreparable. Five generals and a long list of field officers were among the killed. General Patrick Cleburne, a native of Ireland and a veteran of the British army, and General John Adams, both fell in the desperate charges.—*Ibid.*, p. 264.

history of battles, for some reason that has remained unknown to the present time. At midnight the bridges were in shape to use, and as the battle had practically ended, the Confederates having ceased their attacks and fallen back out of range, we commenced withdrawing across the river, falling back on Nashville, eighteen long miles away. Worn out with a week's fighting and marching, without sleep or sufficient food, we plodded along. On arriving at the outskirts of Nashville, we were assigned to positions in the line drawn around the city; so, our little army came straggling in all day. Hood's army did not follow until the second day after. They had remained at Franklin to care for the wounded and bury the dead of both armies. The Union wounded were brought with us to Nashville, but we were compelled to leave our dead on the field at Franklin.

On the morning of the 4th of December we discovered General Hood's army forming their lines along the Harpeth hills something like three miles from our lines. We lay in that position, our armies facing each other, until Dec. 15th. General Schofield was our commanding general until we arrived at Nashville, when General Thomas, who met us there with reinforcements, assumed command. From December 1st to the 15th we had a severe spell of winter weather, snow and sleet falling incessantly and freezing every night, making it very hard for us, as we had lost all of our extra clothing on the retreat back from Columbia.

HOOD'S RAID ENDED AT NASHVILLE

Having provided his army with everything needed in way of shoes, clothing, provisions, etc., General Thomas ordered the advance on the morning of the 15th. As we marched out and formed our line of battle with an advance line of skirmishers well in the front, the sun burst through the clouds and a cheer rang out from one end of the line to the other as we advanced to the attack.⁷

I will not attempt to give any of the details of the two days battle at Nashville. Suffice to say, the Confederates were not in condition to stand the gaff. We fought line to line for two days, though; when in a starving condition, barefooted, bareheaded, half of them with only about one-half rags enough to cover their bodies, the army of Hood was dispersed and hundreds of them threw down their arms and surrendered, begging for something to eat; and I will say here, they did not beg in vain, for the "Yanks," as they called us, I am glad to record, divided with them down to the last hardtack, and every man that had an extra shirt or garment of any kind, gladly gave it to help cover their nakedness.

The battle of Franklin undoubtedly stopped what surely would

⁷There were eight Iowa units in the reenforcements brought by Gen. Thomas, taking part in the Battle of Nashville, namely, the Second Battery, the Second, Fifth and Eighth Cavalry, and the Twelfth, Twenty-seventh, Thirty-second and Thirty-fifth Infantry.

have been one of the most disastrous raids ever attempted by any army during the Civil war. For, had our little army been defeated and compelled to surrender to General Hood at Franklin, nothing could have stopped the Confederates from going as far north as they wished, burning, confiscating and destroying property, in reprisal for what General Sherman's army had done at Atlanta.

As a Southern writer has well said: "the Ghost of the Battlefield of Franklin haunted the men of Hood's army," and the fight was all taken out of them. After following the remnant of Hood's army and seeing them across the Tennessee river at Florence, our army was split up and sent into winter quarters. The brigade to which my regiment belonged marched to Decatur, Alabama, where we put up quarters out of brick taken from where buildings had been burned, put on roofs of canvass. There we had very comfortable quarters and remained until April 1, 1865, when the Fourth Army Corps was again assembled and entrained to Blue Springs, East Texas, where we were guarding a gap in the mountains when we received the news of Lee's surrender to Grant, and the heart-breaking news of our beloved Lincoln's assassination.

Shortly thereafter we were shipped back to Nashville, where we remained until about the 15th of June, when we again broke camp, and received orders to proceed to Jacksonville, Tennessee. Here we were assembled aboard river boats, steamed down the Tennessee river into the Ohio, down the Ohio into the Mississippi to New Orleans. There we went into camp a short way below Jackson's battle grounds, called Camp Shallmatti; remained until the 18th of July when we were loaded on transports and taken around the southern coast of Texas, entered the Matagorda bay and landed at Port Lavaca, Texas, July 23, 1865. The entire Fourth Army Corps was transported to Texas and scattered along in reaching distance of Mexico, and when all was ready, Uncle Sam invited Maximillian to evacuate and Mac accepted the invitation.

MUSTERED OUT IN 1866

We remained in Texas until December 16th when we embarked for home, by way of the Gulf of Mexico, around to New Orleans. My regiment left New Orleans on Christmas day; arrived at Cairo, Illinois on New Years day; proceeded to Springfield Barracks, where we were mustered out of service January 10, 1866.

I was fourteen years and nineteen days of age when I enlisted and fifteen years, ten months and two days old when discharged. My oldest brother was a member of the 113th Illinois Infantry and died carrying the stars and stripes at the head of his regiment in the first battle of Vicksburg on June 19, 1863. My other two brothers, with whom I served in Co. G, 42nd regiment, Illinois Volunteer Infantry, came home all right.

On arriving home from the army, I attended school for the bal-

ance of the term. Owing to the scarcity of employment in our vicinity, I then drifted over to the lumber woods of Michigan, where I remained two years at all kinds of work from skidding logs with an oxen team to running a sawmill engine. Returning home in the summer of 1868 I remained there until February 10, 1869, when I came to Des Moines and on the 14th entered the employ of the C. R. I. & P. Ry. as fireman upon a locomotive and have been in the employ of that company since that time, serving forty years as a locomotive engineer.

In 1877 my home was in Stuart, Iowa, where we raised a company of the Iowa National Guard and I was elected captain. In 1878 I was elected major of the old Third regiment to which my company belonged, and in 1881 I was elected lieutenant colonel of the Third regiment. I served in the National Guard under three governors—Newbold, Gear (two terms) and Sherman, in all nearly nine years.

MISSOURI'S NEW CONSTITUTION

The president of the Iowa Pioneer Lawmakers association for the current biennium, Israel A. Smith, was a member of the 1944 Constitutional convention that wrote a new constitution for the state of Missouri, which will be voted upon at a special state election there February 27, 1945.

Mr. Smith was chairman of the committee on public health and welfare, and a member of other important committees. He took an active part in preparing a thoroughly modern state constitution, which, among other things, is notable for being much shorter than the present one.

Mr. Smith was a member of the Iowa House of Representatives from Decatur county in the Thirty-fourth General Assembly, and in recent years has been living at Independence, Mo. His fine, scholarly attainments, and experience in legislation, no doubt served him well as a member of the Constitutional convention.

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.