

THE NATION

"TO CARE FOR HIM WHO HAS BORNE THE BATTLE, AND FOR HIS WIDOW AND ORPHANS."

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ARMY OF THE CUMBERLAND

AND THE BATTLE OF STONE RIVER.

Preliminary Movements—Strength of the Opposing Armies—Advance of the Union Forces. Skirmishing—Alignment of the Troops—Ready for Battle.

From a forthcoming history of "Kentucky in the War," by G. C. Kniffin, late lieutenant-colonel on the staff of Major-General Thomas L. Crittenden.

II.

December, 1862, was a busy month. The year was fast drawing to a close, and both Union and confederate generals had little to report save plots and counterplots. On the part of each there was little that was encouraging. The early spring had found Middle and West Tennessee in possession of the former. Two large armies occupied all prominent points, and the beaten confederates encamped in Mississippi were confronted by an army too powerful for them to attack.

Early autumn witnessed the enforced retirement of Buell's army to the line of the Ohio River, while the confederates reaped the harvests in Kentucky and Middle Tennessee.

The 10th of December found Grant embarked upon his march southward to Vicksburg, driving Pemberton before him. Sherman arranging for co-operation by water, the Army of the Cumberland encamped near Nashville, with Bragg's twice defeated army in its front, and Hindman's beaten troops flying before the victorious divisions of Herron and Blunt from the battle-field of Prairie Grove.

East Tennessee being left comparatively free from molestation by the abandonment of pursuit through Cumberland Gap, Gen. Kirby Smith was at liberty to reinforce points more strongly threatened. He had no sooner succeeded in collecting his stragglers and reorganizing his army, reinforcing it by several new regiments, than, in compliance with orders from the confederate war department, he dispatched Stevenson's division to the relief of Pemberton at Grenada, and McCown, with his division, to report to Bragg at Murfreesboro.

The withdrawal of Buell from Middle Tennessee had been followed at once by the occupation of that territory. Major-General Samuel Jones, in command at Chattanooga, had followed this movement with such vigilance with the cavalry command of General Maxey as to hasten the departure of the rear guards from Bridgeport and Huntsville, and the 1st of September found Forrest with a cavalry brigade in occupation at Murfreesboro, calling for reinforcements to aid him in the capture of Nashville.

These arrived in October under command of Major-General Breckinridge, who was soon followed by the Corps of Polk and Hardee, to the latter of which Breckinridge's division was assigned. In conformity with the general plan of operations against Nashville General Bragg had made Murfreesboro, thirty miles southeast from Nashville, the centre of his line. Here he stationed Polk's Corps and Breckinridge's division. The remainder of Hardee's Corps was stationed at Eagleville, twenty miles west, with his advance at Columbia. Stevenson's division was posted at Readyville, with McMinnville, thirty miles east from Murfreesboro, occupied by his advance. From these flanks the cavalry brigades of Forrest and Morgan pounced upon their prey in West Tennessee and Kentucky, relying for safety upon the swiftness of their steeds as well as upon the courage and audacity of the officers and men composing their commands.

Wheeler's cavalry was posted upon the many turnpikes and country roads converging at Murfreesboro.

The total effective strength of Bragg's command at Murfreesboro and vicinity, exclusive of the brigades of Forrest and Morgan, on the 17th of December, was 41,036 infantry and artillery, and 6,894 cavalry.

The number reported on the returns of the Army of the Cumberland, including post forces at Bowling Green and Nashville, on December 20th, was: Infantry, 67,088; artillery, 34 batteries, 3,569; cavalry, 7,297. From this force two divisions and two brigades of General Thomas's command (the Right Wing under General McCook and the Left Wing under Crittenden) were concentrated in front of Nashville for offensive operations. The strength of the twenty-six brigades in this organization was by the same returns stated at 54,741, infantry and artillery. The cavalry, formed into three brigades, two of which formed Kennett's division, was stated at 4,849, making a total of 59,590, leaving to guard the railroad and the temporary base at Nashville 8,364 of all arms.

Before moving, several important changes were made in division and brigade commanders. General J. M. Palmer superseded Brigadier-General William Soney Smith in command of the old Nelson division in Crittenden's Corps, Brigadier-General James S. Negley was assigned to Dumont's division in the Centre, and Brigadier-General R. W. Johnson assumed command of General Sill's division of McCook's Corps.

The two armies, as they stood facing each other thirty miles apart on Christmas day, estimated their respective numbers as follows:

OFFICIAL RETURNS.			
Army.	Arm.	Effectives present.	Total Aggregate.
Rosecrans's...	Infantry	55,647	60,562
	Cavalry	4,849	6,780
	Artillery	2,263	2,422
	Total	62,759	69,754
Bragg's...	Infantry	39,290	45,887
	Cavalry	6,894	8,229
	Artillery	1,746	1,874
	Total	47,930	56,970

Orders for a forward movement were issued on

WEDNESDAY, THE 24TH OF DECEMBER,

and on Christmas morning the camps were alive with preparation. The day was spent in writing to loved ones far away among the snow-covered hills of the great Northwest. Tattoo found groups of men discussing the chances of coming battle. Here and there was a soldier giving the last finishing touch to the gleaming gun-barrel. The surgeon in his tent sat before a table on which in glittering display lay the implements of his craft. The long keen knife, the saw, the probe were each in turn subjected to close inspection and carefully adjusted in the case. Field officers paid a last visit to their faithful chargers and exhorted grooms to feed early and not to forget to bring along an extra feed lest perchance the following night would find the troops far in advance of the wagons. Quartermasters, that hard worked and little appreciated class of officers, toiling through the long night with their loaded wagon trains getting into position for an orderly march; commissaries, upon whose vigilance all depended, carrying out orders for three days' rations in haversacks and five days' more in wagons. A busy day was followed by a busy night. The clatter of horses' hoofs upon the turnpike roads leading out of Nashville to the encampments sounded all through the night. Now a solitary orderly galloped down from division headquarters bearing a message to a brigade commander. Soon a group of officers rode gaily by from a late carousal at the St. Cloud; then came a Corps commander with staff and escort from conference with the Chief, his last injunction ringing in their ears.

"UN MOVE TO-MORROW, GENTLEMEN.

We shall begin to skirmish, probably, as soon as we pass the outposts. Press them hard. Drive them out of their nests. Make them fight or run. Strike hard and fast; give them no rest. Fight them! fight them! fight them! I say," as the uplifted right hand emphasized each sentence upon the palm of the left. Thomas received the orders with a grim smile of approval; McCook's sharp eyes twinkled with enjoyment; Crittenden straightened his trim figure, and his eyes shone as he stalked out of the room, followed by his aides, as if in haste to begin his part of the programme.

It was expected that Bragg would make a stand at Stewart's Creek, five miles in rear of La Vergne, and the movement of the different corps was ordered as follows: McCook, with the Right Wing, three divisions, to advance by the Nolensville pike to Triune. Thomas, with two divisions of the Centre, to advance on his right by the Franklin and Wilson pikes, threatening Hardee's right, and then to fall in by the cross-roads to Nolensville. Crittenden, with the Left Wing, three divisions, to advance by the Murfreesboro pike to La Vergne. McCook was to attack Hardee at Triune, and if Bragg reinforced that point, Thomas was to join McCook. If Hardee retreated, and Bragg showed fight at Stewart's Creek, Crittenden was to attack him. Thomas was to come in on Crittenden's right, and McCook, after dispatching one division to follow Hardee—if retreating south—was to move across the country on Bragg's rear.

General Stanley, dividing his cavalry, assigned Minty's brigade (under Colonel Kennett) to Crittenden, Zahm's brigade to the right of McCook, and reserved for himself less than one thousand with which to move in advance of McCook to Nolensville. The Fourth Regular Cavalry, under Captain Elmer Otis, a brave and experienced officer, was reserved for escort and courier duty. After supplying details for escorts at Corps Headquarters, the total effective strength of the three cavalry brigades was little more than 3,000 men.

LESS THAN ONE-HALF THE NUMBER of effectives brigaded under Wheeler, Wharton, Pegram, and Buford. The Fifteenth Pennsylvania, or Anderson Cavalry, which had been sent West at the special request of General Rosecrans, 900 strong, turned out only 300 strong, the remainder stacking their arms and refusing to move until properly officered. The movement began at daylight on Friday, the 26th. The sky was overcast by dense black clouds, which soon burst, and torrents of rain deluged the deserted camps, glancing off from the well-covered shoulders of the men as they filed out into the highways to assume their allotted position in the column.

There was glorious assurance in the manly stride, the determined look, and in the triple armor with which he is clad who hath his quarrel just; and his must be a dull ear, indeed, who did not note, in the merry jest and tuncful song that floated along the ranks, the augury of victory.

At the head of their respective columns rode Thomas, accompanied by his staff officers, with the brave and accomplished Major-General Geo.

E. Flynt at their head. There was Von Schroeder, Mack, Mackay, and the rest. McCook, with Langdon, Nodine, Thruston, Campbell, and Williams. Crittenden, followed by Starling, Loder, Mendenhall, Buford, John McCook, Knox, and the writer of this chronicle.

BRAVE HEARTS BEAT HIGH THAT DAY.

On the right, far in advance of the infantry, rode Stanley, with trusty Sinclair by his side, while his cavalry swept on out the Nolensville pike, driving Wheeler's pickets before them.

Sturdy John Kennett, with a brigade at his heels, advanced upon the broad turnpike road straight toward the enemy, nor stopped until nightfall, notwithstanding constant skirmishing, when, on reaching an eminence that overlooked La Vergne, a large force was encountered. The plain below was dotted with groups of cavalry. Suddenly a puff of smoke and a shell well aimed along the line of the road, carried death in its track. Another and another followed in quick succession, clearing the road as fast as men's legs could carry them. The head of Palmer's infantry column came up and halted at the side of the road. General Crittenden and his staff rode forward to watch the artillery duel now in progress—for Newell's battery had unlimbered at the first shot and was firing rapidly. Mr. Robert H. Crittenden (a brother of the General) and the writer, his boon companion, riding side by side, advanced beyond their companions in full view of the artilleryists, presenting a conspicuous mark. Quick as lightning a shell came hissing through the air and passed in the narrow space of a yard between their horses. It is needless to add that, their curiosity being gratified, they lost no time in seeking the friendly cover of a log house by the roadside. Newell planted his shots from two three-inch Rodmans with such dexterity as to silence the enemy's battery of four guns. Colonel Emyart, with the First Kentucky and the Thirty-first Indiana infantry, supported on the right by Colonel W. C. Whitaker with the Sixth Kentucky and Ninth Indiana, preceded by Colonel Murray with the Third Kentucky cavalry, now moved to the left and advanced through the cedars towards Stony Creek, where they were met by a force sent to intercept them. The order to charge with the bayonet was followed by a swift rush across the creek, the routed confederates flying before the gleaming steel, and the army bivouacked for the night before La Vergne.

GENERAL ROUSSEAU,

marching by the Franklin pike without meeting opposition, encamped at Owen's Store, on the Wilson pike. Negley, marching in advance, had heard the sound of Johnson's guns, and, marching to his support, encamped near Nolensville. Walker's brigade stopped at Brentwood. McCook reached Nolensville, and finding it occupied by a considerable force of infantry, cavalry, and artillery, Pest's brigade was sent forward to dislodge them. Carlin formed his brigade on Post's right, and the line, completed by Woodruff's brigade on the extreme right, pushed steadily forward, driving the enemy before them through the town to a rugged hill two miles beyond, where he greeted the advance of Davis's line with shells at long range. Hotchkiss and Pinny moved up and administered a few shots, when the infantry dashed up the hill and captured two bronze field pieces, routing their supports. On one of the guns was inscribed "Shiloh." It was captured by the One Hundred and First Ohio, Colonel Stern. Stanley had done his work in front of Sheridan so well, stirring up the confederate cavalry and driving it before him, that the infantry had found nothing to do but march quietly along the road to Nolensville. Major Rosengarten had particularly distinguished himself with the Anderson Troop and won from Stanley the encomium, "They went into the fight as if they liked it." The Major had a singular encounter with a burly antagonist. Both their pistols missed fire, when the combatants closed, and the confederate was getting the best of it when a stinging blow from the Major's fist brought the latter to grass, where he was captured.

CRITTENDEN'S COLUMN,

under the impatient leadership of its gallant commander, was aroused before daylight. Wood's division took the lead, but it was soon apparent that the route did not lead along the highway. Line of battle was formed, and being already far advanced, the left wing rested on their arms until McCook should have time to move forward to a parallel line. At eleven o'clock the cavalry bugles sounded to horse, and presently a line of horsemen filed into the road, moving off toward the flanks, infantry skirmishers were thrown out, and the column was again in motion. In front lay the village of La Vergne, occupied by Maney's brigade of infantry, Wheeler's cavalry, dismounted, and posted in the houses and upon the wooded heights in the rear; two batteries of artillery posted behind the town commanded the turnpike road. Hascall's brigade was assigned the task of clearing the town, and it was done in gallant style at a loss of twenty men killed and wounded.

Supported by Esteppe's battery, the brigade pressed through the village encountering stubborn opposition at every wooded hill or other obstruction behind which half a dozen men could obtain temporary cover. Under a drenching storm the column moved steadily forward in momentary expectation of being formed in line of battle. Stewart's Creek, flowing deep between rugged and precipitous banks five miles beyond La Vergne,

was crossed by a bridge which it was a matter of prime importance to save. Maney's brigade, on outpost duty, 1,400 strong, at Stewart's Creek, had advanced to La Vergne on Friday afternoon. Discovering that the force in his front was really the advance of a large command, General Maney, on consultation with Wheeler, communicated his opinion to General Bragg and fell back along the pike toward Murfreesboro, his march hastened by the vigorous pursuit of Hascall's stout infantry.

His battery flew across the bridge under whip and spur, and the rear caisson had barely crossed when the torch was applied to a pile of combustibles placed upon the bridge.

THE FLAMES SHOT UPWARD,

and a few minutes would have sufficed for its destruction, when the Third Kentucky infantry, deployed as skirmishers, the gallant McKee at their head, dashed forward and extinguished the flames. A battery rained down a torrent of shells from an eminence beyond the bridge. The fearful accuracy of aim convinced Hascall that this was different artillery from that he had encountered at La Vergne. Nearly every shot told with fatal effect. The range of Esteppe's guns was too short to reach Maney's battery, and time was precious. Another battery was brought forward of longer range, and unlimbered as quickly as courage and discipline, aided by willing hands, could accomplish it. One after another, like strokes of a clock, shells were flying, and Maney limbered up and got out of the way.

General Hascall now made preparations to encamp, the Third Kentucky in possession of the bridge, when a squadron of Alabama partisan rangers, who had been left on the flank when Wheeler crossed the bridge, made a dash upon the Twenty-sixth Ohio on Hascall's left to join their companions. The Twenty-sixth changed front to the left and delivered a volley, which repulsed the charge. A company of the One Hundredth Illinois, under Captain Mungen, sent to the left to protect the flank of the regiment, was cut off and their surrender demanded. The company responded by a volley, following it up with a charge, in which twenty-four of the Alabamians were captured, with twelve horses and accoutrements.

The loss in Hascall's brigade during the day was twenty-nine wounded, more or less seriously. While Hascall was thus

PUSHING ON IN ADVANCE

of the main column, sweeping cavalry, infantry, and artillery before him, a steeple chase was going on on the Jefferson pike some distance to his right. The Second brigade of Palmer's division, under Colonel Wm. B. Hazen, was sent on this road, after passing La Vergne, with orders similar to Hascall's to save the bridge on that road over Stewart's Creek. Captain Maxey, with ninety men of the Fourth Michigan cavalry, was assigned to this brigade, who were sent ahead with orders to push on until the enemy's pickets were encountered, charge them at full speed, and not to stop until the bridge, five miles ahead, was reached. The pickets were encountered three miles from the bridge, at which time Hazen's infantry and artillery were well closed up. The bold cavalrymen had heard the order and interpreted it literally. Settling themselves in their saddles, their trusty repeating rifles in their hands, the cavalcade swept down the road followed at double quick by their infantry supporters.

A regiment of cavalry 300 strong was stationed in front of the bridge, with pickets posted far in advance. Nearer and nearer came the sound of horses feet upon the stony road, mingled with the sharp rattle of Maxey's rifles. There was no time to estimate relative strength;—safety lay in the rear, and in a few minutes the entire regiment was scrambling across the bridge, followed by their pursuers. Once across, the commander regained his senses and formed his men in line to resist the farther progress of the Union cavalry. A battery came dashing up from Hazen's front, and a few shells sufficed to put them to flight. Both brigades were now in possession of the advancing army. Hazen's loss was one trooper killed and two captured. He killed one officer and several men and captured ten of the enemy.

BY A GALLANT DASH

Colonel Kennett, who had been slashing at Wheeler all day, cut off and captured a detachment of thirty-six men of Allen's Alabama cavalry. On the night of Saturday the 27th, Crittenden's front was on the line of Stewart's Creek. Negley closed upon his right, Rousseau was at Nolensville, and McCook, who had met and dispersed a considerable force at Triune, encamped with Johnson's division across Wilson's Creek, Sheridan near the village, and Davis at the junction of the Bully Jack road with the Nolensville pike. Walker's brigade, by order of Gen. Thomas, moved from Brentwood across to the Nolensville pike.

The 28th being the Sabbath there was no general advance. General Rosecrans was a rigid Catholic and by no means averse to letting it be known. Willrich made a reconnaissance in McCook's front seven miles on the Shelbyville road, and learned that Hardee had retired to Murfreesboro. Rousseau moved to Stewart's Creek, and Stanley rode to College Hill and confirmed Willrich's report concerning Hardee's movement.

Early on the morning of the 29th, Stanley moved with the reserve cavalry on the Bully Jack road in advance of the Right Wing, followed closely by Davis's division. Sheridan came next.

and Johnson, detaching Baldwin's brigade to remain in observation at Triune, brought up the rear. The Anderson cavalry, under command of the brave Rosengarten, drove the confederate cavalry at full charge across Stewart's Creek, where Stanley's little command was increased by Zahm's brigade. At Wilkinson's cross-roads Wharton drew up his brigade to dispute any further advance. Forming his command in line of battle, Stanley ordered a charge, which resulted in driving the confederates across Overall's Creek upon the infantry posted in front of Murfreesboro. Rosengarten, pressing too far, fell upon the infantry and was killed. The command now devolved upon Major Ward, who also fell desperately wounded, when the Troop fell back in confusion to the rear. Sheridan bivouacked at Overall's Creek; Johnson and Davis at Wilkinson's cross-roads.

The Left Wing advanced on the same day in line of battle along the Murfreesboro pike. Wood on the left, Palmer on the right,

VAN CLEVE IN RESERVE.

Wagner's brigade in Wood's front, and Grose's brigade on the right, drove the enemy's skirmishers before them to within two and a half miles of Murfreesboro, where indications were observed of a heavy force in their front. Negley's division marched abreast with Crittenden's right, crossing Stewart's Creek two miles above the bridge, on the Murfreesboro pike. Rousseau remained in camp at Stewart's Creek, resting after a toilsome march through the mud the day before. Starkweather's trusty brigade was sent to guard the Stewart Creek bridge on the Jefferson pike, while Walker moved with his brigade to Stewart's Creek. Generals Rosecrans and Thomas were in consultation at Bridge's house, near Stewart's Creek, when a signal message from the front reported Crittenden's advance in sight of Murfreesboro, and the enemy in retreat. Moving forward in the line above-mentioned, Wagner's brigade rested on the pike, occupying a piece of wooded ground with an open field in front. Hascall's left rested on Stone River. Between them was Harker's brigade. On the right, Palmer's brigades came into position with Grose on the left, and Craft on the right. Hazen's brigade had been left at Stewart's Creek. Van Cleve was within supporting distance, but Negley, marching over difficult ground, was far in the rear.

Crittenden's orders were to go into Murfreesboro, and he was inclined to obey them. Riding forward, he found the two advance divisions arranged in line of battle, and, against the remonstrance of General Wood, ordered a forward movement. Palmer united with Wood, however, in a protest, on the ground that an advance at night over unknown ground, in the face of a force of unknown strength, was too hazardous to be undertaken. General Crittenden finally suspended the execution of the order one hour, until General Rosecrans could be heard from. General Rosecrans came up soon after and countermanded the order.

IN FRONT OF THE POSITION

lay Stone River, running obliquely towards their left, forming a triangular field, lined on the right by a dense growth of cedars, on the left by the stream, the line of battle forming the base. When Crittenden's order was first given General Wood had prepared to obey it, and two brigades (Harker's and Hascall's) first reaching the river, Harker in advance, dashed through the water and were met on the other side by a sharp fire from the skirmish line in the front of General Breckinridge's division of five brigades posted on an eminence in their immediate front. The Fifty-first and Seventy-third Indiana in advance immediately deployed as skirmishers, and pressing forward reserved their fire until within a few yards, when they delivered it with such effect as to drive the confederates back pell-mell upon the main line. The entire brigade crossed and took position, but the commander finding himself in the presence of a long line of infantry stretching away to his left out of view from his division commander, reported for orders. In the meantime the order to advance was suspended, and Harker was directed to withdraw. To obey the order required both skill and discipline, but it was brilliantly executed. The Left Wing, 13,288 strong, bivouacked on the night of the 29th within 700 yards of the confederate works. An old tollgate house served as headquarters for the corps commander, where late at night he was joined by General Rosecrans, the left of the command extending half a mile down the river. Hazen's brigade came up and was placed in line with his division. Negley formed on the right of Palmer, with his right on the Wilkinson pike. The soldiers lay down on the wet ground, without fires, under a drenching rain, and there was nothing to indicate the proximity of two hostile armies that were soon to meet in a death-grapple in which 20,000 men were to be reported in the morning returns as

KILLED, WOUNDED, AND MISSING.

The slumbers of the commanding general were disturbed at half-past three on the morning of the 30th by a call from General McCook, who was instructed to rest his left upon Negley's right. Sheridan's division therefore, preceded by Stanley, moved on the Wilkinson turnpike, closely followed by Johnson and Davis. Skirmishing into position, the line was formed by resting the left of Sheridan's division on the Wilkinson pike, Davis on his right and Johnson

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