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Stones River NMP  
Box 476  
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

# RECOLLECTIONS

## Stone's River.

A PAPER

FORWARDED AND READ BEFORE THE

### MICHIGAN COMMANDERY

OF 7008

### Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the U. S.

BY

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MICHIGAN COMMANDERY,

M. O. L. L. U. S.

9th Mich Inf.  
Packhurst John G. Col.

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## Recollections of Stone's River.

Recognizing the orders of this Commandery as obligatory upon all companions, and having some time ago been ordered to write a paper, and upon a named subject, I proceed to give my "recollections of the Battle of Stone's River."

As the writer had been boating at the expense of Jefferson Davis' Government for some months previous to the Stone's River campaign, he will not be able to give many of the particulars of the preliminary arrangements for the battle.

Upon rejoining his regiment, the Ninth Michigan Infantry, at Nashville, on the 24th day of December, 1862, the regiment was assigned to General George H. Thomas as the provost guard of the center of the Army of the Cumberland.

The next morning he found his Christmas present in the form of an order placing him in command of the provost guard of the Fourteenth Army Corps, with instructions to report to General Thomas, and to advance to the front on the following morning with the center of the army.

The Army of the Cumberland had recently been placed under the command of General W. S. Rosecrans, and had been reorganized with a view to an advance toward that stronghold,—Chattanooga.

The right wing of the army was placed under the command of General A. McD. McCook, and was composed of the divisions of General P. H. Sheridan, General Jeff. C. Davis, and General R. W. Johnson.

The center of the army was placed under the command of General George H. Thomas, and was composed of the divisions of General Rousseau, General J. S. Negley, and General S. S. Fry.

The left wing of the army was placed under the command of General Thomas L. Crittenden, and was composed of the divisions of General H. P. Van Cleve, General T. J. Wood, and General John M. Palmer.

The cavalry was under the command of General D. S. Stanley.

The aggregate strength of General Rosecrans' army was not far from 48,000 men.

It was known to General Rosecrans that the rebel army under General Bragg was intrenched in the vicinity of Murfreesboro, thirty miles southeast of Nashville, and that Bragg had established winter quarters at that point with a force of about 45,000 men.

At 6 o'clock on the morning of December 26th, 1862, the army of General Rosecrans moved out of camp at Nashville, supplied with ammunition and ten days' rations, and advanced upon the position of the enemy.

This advance was made upon the Franklin, Nolensville, Wilson, Edmonson, Murfreesboro and Jefferson Pikes.

An evidence of the watchfulness of General Bragg is found in the fact that, in no direction had the army of Rosecrans moved two miles before it met with a stubborn resistance from the enemy; but the army of Rosecrans was so full of vigor and fight that, although the rain poured down in torrents, no complaints were heard, and the enemy was pushed back upon all the pikes.

On the 27th the right wing, under McCook, met with a strong resistance at Nolensville and at Truane, General Hardee having his corps in line of battle at the first named point.

The left wing also met with a strong resistance at Lavergne and at Stewart's Creek. The center threatening Hardee on our right, and sending troops in either direction, as they were required, to force the enemy back.

Thus the Army of the Cumberland pushed its way against and over the enemy for nearly thirty miles, and until he was driven into his line of intrenchments before Murfreesboro.

General Rosecrans having assumed an offensive position, Bragg looked for an attack upon his lines on the morning of the 30th, and made several demonstrations during the day to test the position and strength of the Union lines.

General Rosecrans divided his line during the 30th between developing the position of Bragg's troops and establishing his own line of battle. This he did by placing Wood's division on the left of his line, Wood's left resting on Stone's River, and his right on the Nashville Pike; Palmer's division, on Wood's right; Negley's division, on Palmer's right; Sheridan's division, on Negley's right; Davis' division, on Sheridan's right; and the brigades of Generals Whittick and Kirk on the right and rear of Davis, with Baldwin's brigade held in reserve in rear of the right.

General Van Cleve was held in reserve on the west bank of the river in rear of the left.

General Rousseau was held in reserve in rear of the center. The trend of this line was in a northwest and southeast direction, and conformed to the rebel line of battle.

Bragg's left wing was on the west side of Stone's River; and was commanded by General Polk, and consisted of the divisions of General Withers and General B. F. Cheatham.

Bragg's right wing was on the east side of the river, and consisted of the divisions of General John C. Breckenridge and General Pat Cleburn, and was commanded by William J. Hardee.

McCook's division was held in reserve in rear of the rebel center.

And Jackson's troops were held in reserve in rear of the rebel right.

Wheeler's rebel cavalry was operating on the right, and Wharton's rebel cavalry was held on the rebel left.

This was substantially the position of the enemy when General Rosecrans established his own lines and issued his order of battle, which contemplated engaging the enemy's left and holding it in position, while with his own left and center he would attack the enemy's right flank and center and drive him into the woods west of Murfreesboro, while he would move into the town and hold it.

On the morning of the 31st, General Rosecrans issued an address to the soldiers of the Army of the Cumberland, which was distributed to the troops, in which he said:

"Soldiers, the eyes of the whole nation are upon you, the very fate of the nation may be said to hang on this day's battle. Be true, then, to yourselves, true to your own manly character and soldierly reputation, true to the love of your dear ones at home, whose prayers ascend to God this day for your success. Be cool, do not throw away your lives, close steadily in upon your enemy, and when you get within charging distance, rush upon him with the bayonet."

The Ninth Michigan Infantry, the provost guard, was in position at General Thomas' headquarters in rear of the centre, and the writer was occupied in reading this stirring appeal to the valor and patriotism of the soldiers of the Army of the Cumberland, and in listening to the raging battle, when his attention was directed to the approach of a lot of teamsters, riding their harnessed mules on a keen run to the rear, and in advance of the running mules was one particular negro, who, though very black, had an absolute pallor upon his countenance, and about four inches of tongue

protruding from his mouth, his eyes bulging nearly out of his head. If any companion has ever seen an intensely tired and frightened darkey he can draw the picture for himself. Following this advance of alarmist, crying "all is lost," came first, cavalrymen, then teams cut loose from wagons, with each mule bearing from two to three riders, then came panic-stricken infantrymen.

It being a part of the writer's duty to prevent straggling, and to keep men with their respective commands, he sent out details to pick up these terrified troops, but the picking up soon became pretty lively business, and he found it necessary to place the Ninth Michigan in line of battle across the Nashville Pike, extending its flanks to the utmost limit, and he was none too soon in this movement. Cavalry, artillery, infantry, sutlers and camp followers came rushing with the force of a cyclone, and the Ninth Michigan was ordered to fix bayonets and charge upon this panic-stricken mass of men.

The charge was made, and the result was gratifying, the stampede was checked and the fleeing mass of troops were halted, put in line facing the enemy, until a force of some thousands of infantry, eight pieces of artillery and several hundred cavalry were placed in a favorable position, from which this recently terrified force several times repulsed the charges of the pursuing enemy, and finally, after General Walker, with his brigade, including the Fourth Michigan Artillery, came forward from Stewart's Creek, we were enabled to drive the enemy back to his lines, and to some extent relieve the right of Rosecrans' Army, after which, the troops which had been driven from McCook's right, were enabled to rejoin their command, and subsequently, and before the battle ended, exhibited as much bravery, heroism and fighting qualities as the best American soldiers.

As indicated, General Rosecrans' intention was to attack and turn the rebel right.

General Bragg, somehow, seemed to have about the same idea of the direction of the impending battle that Rosecrans had, except that Bragg aimed to rush upon the Federal right flank and rear, and get on the Union line of communication with Nashville.

With this object in view Bragg, during the night of the 30th, withdrew Cleburn's division from his right and placed it upon the left of Chenham, and withdrew McCown's division from the reserve and placed it on the left of Cleburn, and beyond McCown placed his cavalry under command of General Wharton.

Bragg also called Hardee from his right wing, and placed him in command of these troops on the left of Polk, with instructions to attack the Federal line on the right flank and rear at dawn of the 31st.

This new position of Bragg's troops extended his left at least a mile beyond the Federal right, leaving his own right to be protected and held by Breckenridge division, supported by Adams.

As early as 6 o'clock on the morning of the 31st Wharton's cavalry had, without being discovered, passed around Rosecrans' right, and reached the Wilkinson Pike nearly two miles in rear of the lines of battle as had been established by Rosecrans and Bragg.

From this position the enemy made a desperate charge, with a force of over 2,000 cavalry, upon the unprepared brigades of Generals Kirk and Willick.

This bold charge of the enemy threw Kirk's and Willick's brigades into disorder and confusion.

Willick was so far in rear of his command when this dash of the enemy was made upon his troops, that the resistance made by his brigade was without any order or concert of

action, and Willick himself, riding into the confused lines, began to give very imperative orders in his peculiar English, when (as it would seem), out of consideration for his rank, only his horse was shot, and it was intimated to him, by the troops to whom he was giving orders, that their commanding officer wore a different uniform, and that they had been instructed to provide quarters for him inside the rebel lines. Willick was a prisoner, while he supposed himself commanding his own troops.

At the moment Wharton's cavalry rushed upon the rear of Willick's brigade, McCown's division of four brigades charged upon Willick's front, and at the same time Cleburn's division of four brigades came rushing with the usual rebel yell upon Kirk's single brigade.

Notwithstanding the overwhelming force of these brigades, the troops of Kirk were, for a time, kept in order and did some desperate fighting, but General Kirk was wounded and compelled to leave the field, and the regiments of Kirk's and Willick's brigades were overpowered by numbers, each regimental commander reporting that he was attacked in front and upon either flank, and cut off from all support.

The troops of these brigades which had not been killed, captured or wounded were rallied upon the reserve brigade of Baldwin, Colonel Gibson succeeding Willick, and Colonel Dodge succeeding Kirk, and, under the direction of General Johnson, the division inflicted considerable punishment upon the enemy, but were finally forced back a distance of two miles to the Nashville Pike.

Following the defeat of Johnson's division the troops of Cleburn fell upon Davis' flank and rear, while Chenham assailed his front. Being attacked from three directions, Davis with a good deal of difficulty fell back and formed his division on a line at right angles with Sherman.

At the angle of these lines the enemy brought to bear his heavy forces, including several batteries, and seemed to put forth his greatest efforts.

Several desperate charges were made which were handsomely repulsed. It was in charging upon this point that the rebel General Vaughan lost over a third of his brigade, and every horse but three in his command. But the strength of the rebel lines was too great to be longer withstood, and, being again flanked, Davis with much difficulty drew out of the conflict, which left Sheridan's division to suffer similar treatment, having to meet attacks from all directions, which it did manfully. Frequently repulsing the enemy and inflicting terrible punishment upon him, until, getting out of ammunition, Sheridan's division had to cut its way through the enemy and fall back upon the Nashville Pike.

The most desperate fighting now occurred on the flank and front of Negley and Palmer, upon whose divisions the enemy seemed to throw all his available force.

The right wing of Rosecrans' army, which was to hold Polk's corps in check, while with his left he was to gobble up Bragg's right and center, having been driven from the field, Rosecrans began to realize the imminent danger of losing the battle and his army. He therefore abandoned the offensive, and hastened to the center to establish a defensive position, where, with General Thomas, he arranged for establishing a line of defense running nearly parallel with the Nashville Pike and perpendicular to his original line.

As soon as Thomas had selected the ground for the new line he ordered Negley and Rousseau (who had been placed in position to aid the withdrawal of Sheridan) to withdraw to the new line, and at a time when it seemed that the entire force of the enemy had enveloped and were about to annihilate these divisions.

The task was a fearful one, but these divisions cut their way through the ranks of the enemy to the line where General Thomas had placed his artillery.

This new line with Negley on the right of Palmer, Rousseau on Negley's right, and a portion of Van Cleve's and Wood's division, which Rosecrans had hurried from his extreme left, had barely gotten in position, when the enemy, encouraged by his success and certain of victory, made the most desperate charge of the day upon this new position.

But the divisions of Thomas, assisted by troops of Van Cleve and Wood, and by the double-shotted guns of Loomis and Guenther, repulsed this charge with gratifying destruction of life. Four times the enemy attempted to drive Thomas from his position, and as many times was he sent in a dizzy whirl back into the cedars. Thomas held his position, maintained his line, from which, for the balance of the fight, he put the enemy on the defensive, thus saving the day and the Army of the Cumberland.

Bragg becoming satisfied that he could not carry the new line, next made several attempts to turn Rosecrans' left, as he had driven his right, but Rosecrans now having his centre and right in a firm position, gave his attention to his left and repulsed the enemy as often as he attacked him, and the left of Rosecrans' army, by desperate fighting, was maintained during the day.

The success of Bragg in driving three of Rosecrans' divisions a distance of over two miles, and in driving three other divisions from their lines, was alarming. This was not accomplished, however, without terrible loss of life on both sides.

The enemy lost in this day's battle 7,000 men in killed and wounded, while our loss in killed and wounded was over 8,000, including 500 officers, 100 of whom were killed. A

single federal brigade suffered a loss of 22 officers and 518 men in maintaining the new line established by Rosecrans.

After such a day of bloody fighting, with such a fearful loss of life and exhaustion of troops, the commander of each army was satisfied to take a rest and reflect upon the situation.

Bragg hoped Rosecrans would retreat to Nashville, and sent his cavalry round to his rear to intercept his troops and destroy his trains. Rosecrans expected Bragg would renew the offensive on the following morning, and, considering the losses sustained, and the unexpected result of the day's battle, was quite undetermined as to his orders for the morrow. It may be regarded as somewhat significant, however, that, at three o'clock on the morning of January 1st, orders were given the Ninth Michigan Infantry to take headquarters train to Nashville, and to clear the road of all obstructions, except moving trains.

General Rosecrans, having adjusted his lines and provided for the safety of his headquarters, determined to await the action of the enemy. Nothing was done on the first but the strengthening of lines by Rosecrans, and some rather heavy demonstrations by Bragg to find Rosecrans' position.

A little after noon on the second of January, General Bragg, to attract the attention of the federal army, commenced a heavy cannonading on Rosecrans' right and centre, and soon thereafter moved Breckenridge's entire force in heavy masses, and with great vigor, upon Rosecrans' left, which was now established on the east side of the river; this attack was made with such force and such masses as to send Beauty's, Price's and Grider's brigades, of Rosecrans' left, back to the river in confusion.

As Breckenridge's troops came rushing and yelling after the retreating federals, to the river bank, they were confronted by Negley's division, and Hazen's and Craft's brigades of

Palmer's division, and 68 guns which Rosecrans had placed in position.

The storm of iron and lead from these fifty-eight guns at short range, and from these troops, sent the enemy reeling in retreat, and Rosecrans charged the panic-stricken rebels with Miller's and Stanley's brigades, capturing four guns, the colors of a regiment, and many prisoners; the gallant Stoughton of the Eleventh Michigan bringing in, as a trophy, the sword of the captain of a rebel battery.

Rosecrans held this advanced position and intrenched his lines on the east side of the river. This action terminated the fighting for the day, and no heavy fighting was done thereafter.

Notwithstanding the peril in which the enemy had put Rosecrans' army, during the night of the third Bragg withdrew his army from the front of Murfreesboro, and retreated south of Duck River, leaving Rosecrans the victor, and the possessor of Murfreesboro and some 3,000 wounded rebels.

Why was Rosecrans put to such straits, and a large part of his army driven from its position, and some of it in a rout, in the early part of the battle of the 31st?

Among the reasons given are:

**First**—The line of McCook, the right of the army, was in great fault, and he was too obstinate to correct it when his attention was called to it by Rosecrans.

**Second**—There was no adequate cavalry on the federal right to observe the movements of the enemy, the most of the federal cavalry having been sent under Stanley to the vicinity of Lavergne to protect the trains.

**Third**—Rosecrans' contemplated movement upon the rebel right was delayed too long by Crittenden, but Crittenden's delay, in this case, may perhaps be said to have been fortunate. Time will not permit a discussion on this point. It was an agreeable surprise to Rosecrans when the report came



on the morning of the 4th that the rebel army had retreated, giving him the victory of the battle.

The reason for Bragg's retreat, after having achieved what he regarded as a great victory, has never been satisfactorily explained.

I trust it will not be regarded immodest in the writer, at this remote period, to furnish the companions of this commandery,—but the information must go no further,—the occasion which influenced General Bragg to abandon a claimed victory, and withdraw his army from the front of what he officially proclaimed a defeated foe.

It will be remembered that at 8 o'clock on the morning of the first day of January, the Ninth Michigan Infantry was ordered to open the road to Nashville, and to place headquarters train in a secure position, which was successfully accomplished.

In the evening of the second day of January, the writer being at Nashville, received an order from General Thomas to return to the front, with the Ninth Michigan and the headquarters and an ammunition train.

As early as 4 o'clock on the morning of the 3rd the Ninth Michigan moved out of Nashville for Murfreesboro in charge of the trains, also having under its command as many of the routed troops of McCook's corps who had reached Nashville as could be collected.

On reaching Lavergne, we found Colonel Innis' command in line of battle, awaiting a threatened attack from Wheeler's cavalry, which attack was abandoned by Wheeler on the appearance—apparently in support of Innis—of the Ninth Michigan with McCook's stragglers and its train of ammunition.

Wheeler not only abandoned his attack upon Innis, but hastened a report to Bragg that large reinforcements were being sent to Rosecrans from Nashville. No other troops

came to Rosecrans from Nashville on the 3d, and the inference is at least a fair one, that he referred to the Ninth Michigan.

General Bragg, in his official report says: "Reports from Brigadier-General Wheeler satisfied me that the enemy, instead of retiring, was receiving reinforcements. Common prudence and the safety of my army, upon which even the safety of our cause depended, left no doubt in my mind as to the necessity of my withdrawal from so unequal a contest."

Thus, you see, that not only was Innis saved by the opportune arrival of the Ninth Michigan at Lavergne, but Wheeler was so impressed with its extended column as to induce him to hasten a report to Bragg of its march to reinforce Rosecrans.

History has recorded the result of the battle; and whenever you refer to the published histories of the battle of Stone's River, and read the message of the General-in-Chief to the brave commander of the Army of the Cumberland, expressive of the results of the battle, saying, "the victory was well earned and one of the most brilliant of the war; you and your brave army have won the gratitude of your country and the admiration of the world,"—and read the congratulatory message of the great Lincoln to the gallant Rosecrans, which he says: "Your despatch, announcing the retreat of enemy, has just reached here. God bless you, and all with you. Please tender to all, and accept for yourself, the Nation's gratitude for your and their skill, endurance and dauntless courage,"—don't forget the Ninth Michigan Infantry's return to the front.

