

THE BATTLE OF STONE'S RIVER
As Viewed by Wm E. Garlock

In 1862 a Confederate Army based at Chattanooga, Tennessee faced a Union Army under General Buell located at Murfreesboro. The Confederate General, Braxton Bragg, advanced against Buell, slipped by him to the east and moved northward into Kentucky. Buell hastily withdrew to Louisville, which city was in a dither of concern. The Union Army then moved south and on October 8, 1862 met Bragg at Perryville. After some indecisive fighting Bragg withdrew to Chattanooga, somewhat discouraged because he had not been welcomed by the civilian population of Kentucky. Meanwhile Buell returned to Nashville cautiously facing south. He was urged to move against Bragg who was now situated at Murfreesboro. When he did not Buell was removed from command and General Rosecrans was placed in his stead. Rosecrans did not heed the higher command either and continued to set at Nashville gathering supplies and training his army. Finally on December 26th Rosecrans moved out towards Murfreesboro some 25 miles to the southeast of Nashville.

The writer of this letter, Sgt. William Erastus Garlock, was a boy about sixteen years of age who had enlisted in the 42nd Illinois Volunteer Regiment when it was formed in 1861. He came from the DeKalb area and many other soldiers from DeKalb were enrolled with him in Company K of the 42nd. This regiment was first organized by a Col. Webb but command soon shifted to a young lawyer named Roberts. Col. Roberts had moved to Chicago from Pennsylvania in 1858 and had practiced law there until the start of the Civil War. He was an excellent soldier and well liked by the men of the 42nd. The regiment was first assigned in Missouri and then was with General Pope when he moved against Island No. 10 and New Madrid on the upper Mississippi. In this campaign Col. Roberts was directed to destroy a Confederate battery located strategically on an island in the river. Taking forty men in several small boats Roberts set out one dark night. To their dismay flashes of lightning sometimes illuminated the little flotilla. However they were not detected until they nearly reached shore. The Confederate guards fired a wild volley at them, mostly over their heads, and then fled. Roberts and his men landed, destroyed the cannon and then withdrew before the Confederates could regroup.

By the time the 42nd Illinois had reached Nashville Col. Roberts had been promoted to Brigade Commander. His Brigade was in the Division commanded by General Phillip Sheridan which was in turn in the Army Corps commanded by General McCook. On December 26th McCook's Corps moved out towards Murfreesboro on the right flank of the army. This is described in Sgt. Garlock's letter.

In Camp two miles South of
Murfreesboro, Jan the 7th, 63

Dearest Abe, How are you, I am all right. I went through the Battle all right without a scratch. A ball glanced aganst my leg but it left no mark. Well Abe this being the first Battle I have been in I shal try & tell you the whole thing through, so that you can forme some Idea of it. Now Abe it is curous I don't get any Letters frome you or any one else. I shal be obliged to quit writing. I am in the best of Health, & enjoy my self well as usual. it is now nere all right. We have just got our Tent Pitched & my things in it. We struck Tents & roled our blankets with three days rations in our harversacks on the 26th. We started out early on the Nolensvill Pike. Our men passed on with slight skirmishing a long the road untill we got on the south side of the town of Lebohn when they began commenced

playing on us with a six gun Battery. on^{ly} Battery soon give them plenty of business while some of our Iftry. made a charge on their Battery & captured one gun Horses & men They got the others off we haveing no Cavelery with us or we would of taken the whole Battery We had a few killed & wounded but they had more we took quite a No. Prisoners through the course of the day We was on Picket at Night on a High hill just past the town We passed a few secesh Camps about 30,00 The rain poured down about four hours I got as whet as you Pleas but I thought that was nothing if I could only get a whack at the Rebs The 27th was a rainy cold day. We advanced a few miles & had quite a fight with them which resulted in there sceedadel. We encamped nere an old Secesh house We burnt up all his rail fence & got us all the Bacon we wanted and had plenty of Hard Bread. The 28th we lay still it being Sunday. it cleared off pleasent but cold. We lay in plenty of stores frome the Plantations nere us. The 29th we crossed over to the Pike two miles west of the Murfreesboro Pike. The day was a Pleasent day but we had an affell jant through the Swamp. but we got in Camp some after dark we was alowed no fire & it was a rainy & cold night. The 30th we Advanced for Murfreesboro We went a couple miles when they began to dispute our pasage rather seriously. the 92nd was ordered forward as Scermishers they soon went in & the scermish turned into quite a fight before Night. We made them give slowly. Artilery played rather seriously about two hours it rained the most of the day & then at Night we went on Picket We had a No. wounded & a cople killed but no one in our Co. Capt of Co. C was wounded in the face I went out after dark & got a good store of Sweet Potatoes & baked them up & put them in my harversack what I did not eat. The thirty first a Christmas [New Year's Eve] was the day we done our fighting. I think I shal remember that day though I did not think once in the course of the day that it was Christmas.

atnote #1

There seems to be a page of the letter lost here. The happenings were as follows: On December 30th the Union Army was drawn up northwest of Murfreesboro with its left on the west bank of the Stone River, its center extended across the railroad and communications highway and its right, under General A. D. McCook, extended on westward. The Confederate Army's right wing rested on the east bank of the Stone River, its center on the west bank and the left extended westward. Gen. Rosecrans planned to shift his left wing across the Stone River and fall on the Confederate right in force, crush them and then swing to the west and roll up the Confederate Army. Gen. Bragg's plan of attack was similar. He intended to fall on the Union right with his re-inforced left, smash them and then roll them eastward and expose their communication lines. On the morning of December 31 Rosecrans had begun to ferry his left across the river when the sound of battle indicated that Bragg had attacked his right. He immediately stopped this movement across the river. On the right McCook had placed his corps in an order much too extended. Under the furious Southern attack the westernmost divisions of Davis and Johnson were shattered and driven. Brig. Gen. Phillip Sheridan's 3rd division's flank and rear were exposed. Sheridan ordered the brigade of Sill and his reserve regiments to withdraw from the line and Col. Robert's 3rd Brigade, which had changed front and formed in a column of regiments, to charge the enemy.

In the words of Col. Luther P. Bradley of the 3rd Brigade, "About 8:30 a.m. Colonel Roberts ordered the Twenty-second, Forty-second, and Fifty-first to charge the enemy's columns, and gallantly led them in person. The Forty-second and Fifty-first charged in line, with the twenty-second in the rear of the Forty-second, at battalion distance. These regiments went forward at the double-quick, and cleared the wood in front of our lines,

the enemy giving way before we reached him. The line was halted, and opened fire in the timber. After some ten minutes, the line on our right giving way, we were ordered to retire to the lane leading at nearly right angles with the pike, and take a new position."

The new position was held for some time when their flank was turned, then Robert's brigade was ordered back at right angles to Negley's division and Sill and Schaefer's brigades were ordered to form at right angles to Robert's and protect the rear. It was while this order was being executed ~~that~~ the latter again takes up the battle.

had the advantage of them on the retreat & we did to everlastingly wake them up but we had gone but a short distance when we come to a small opening there is where the 42nd got raked. We being on set by the Enemy. Just as I got to the opening I see the boys a falling on every side, so I thought just as I put my foot on the opening will I get wounded or killed but I crossed it all right & the Regt formed just a crost it & lay down. here is where our Brigade suffered there greatest loss here at the edge of the Opening Brave Colm. Roberts fell with five bulett holes through his noble boddy. next come our Collor Sargent (you know him) but he was wounded next Benson fell shot through the head, now about this time I got rather gritty seeing all our best Boys fall to the ground I could not look any way but what I see the Boys a falling here is where our heaviest loss.

Footnote #2
It was at about 10:45 a. m. that the much-loved Roberts was killed. Col. Bradley estimates the brigade loss here at about four hundred killed and wounded in two hours. The brigade was charged three times by Gen. Cheatham's forces. The Confederate artillery had a range of two hundred yards which contributed materially to the tremendous slaughter.

we give them -----& a retreat all the time but slowley, & we would not of retreated any if they had not got us flanked but we was obliged to or be all taken prisoners. We fel baek to the Murfreesboro Pike & there we found Old Rosie with a Pretty large Force to help us & they was soon into it & got all they wanted.

Footnote #3
As the Confederates had taken the ammunition train earlier in the morning Sheridan's division was short of ammunition. They were ordered to fall back slowly. It was impossible to bring off Houghtaling's battery and most of the guns were lost.

Bradley reported that, "These regiments, [twenty-second and forty-second] after suffering a loss of half their numbers, retired toward the Nashville Pike, striking it near the grounds held by General Palmer's division, and being separated from the brigade, reported to him."

Our Regt got some cartrages & then went & relieved a Regt. that had been in for some time here we had a lively time & then went in the woods for the Night & in the morning we was put in the front on the right Centre & remaned there untill we come here

Footnote #4

On the evening of the day the 22nd and 42nd were reunited with the rest of the brigade.

the remaining days Fighting was on the left & Centre, with the exception of one charge they made on our right to get a Battery but they got about half Killed & the remainder Prisoners. The first day they give us fits & had us whiped once if they had of knowen it but old R isent to be fooled our Force engaged the first day was small & over half of them was wounded or Killed about sundown things looked rather dubious but old R said when he give up his Posish then it would be when he & all his men was killed all other Gen but him was for a retreat to Nashvill

Footnote #5

On the results of the first days fighting it looked as if the Union army had been badly whipped. However Rosecrans stood fast in his new position and finally Bragg drew off and retreated towards the south so in the final analysis the victory must be credited to the Northern Army if any credit is to be given.

Old Palmer was there & was one of our Braves & smartest Generles on the Field. You will probably read of him Col. Walworth led us through the struggle & a brave cool man he was Capt Boomer Capt Church & Liut. Townson of Co E was not B & C come up the next day. they had both ought to be dismissed frome the Servis the ----Townson got so scart that he fell down & was taken Prisoner I did not feel any to brave but I made out to Keep with the collors all day & was the last to retreat that is all Co. K done the best of aney that day so the Col. has said Foster lays at Nashvill in the Convalessent Camp also Lyman remained behind to keep good care of the Co. Bagage. Simonds is also at N. sick. Dokey Stroop Kimble Russell Boney & Vanness have joined the Regulars Stuart is in the Poinnere Corps. Russell is wounded bad & is not expected to live. Jim is doing well

Nickels Edmonds, Emly Arst, Beard Condon is wounded & a doing well Bowen & Benston is Killed. Our Division suffered the greatest loss in Officers all the Brigade Commanders & a No [of] Colns. Coln. of the 27th was killed. Our Brigade done well & is highly praised by Rosecrance the most of the Boys have one or more Bullet Holes. One swiped my leg but it only s marded a little while the same as a cut from a whip. Farmer had his gun knocked from his hand by some grape. but he took another & wet in the Copper Bottoms as he called them. he said git you Copper Bottoms when we made the charge. Well Abe I guess I have said enough about the fight but I might say more. The Secesh had a large force of cavelery in our rear they burnt over a hundred wagons loaded with Provisions for us but our Cavelery soon heard of it & Rut after him. the fourth Regulars went in then with drawn Sabres & cut there heads from there Boddys they took no Prisoners but shot them down as they did our men.

Footnote #6

The official reports make note of the loss of the train in the rear but no mention is made of the cavalry fight.

you will here the Particulars of the Battle I suppose I shot about 60 rounds I guess I shot only when I got a good sight of the gray Backs.

DIARY OF WILLIAM ERASTUS GARLOCK
March 6, 1863 to August 8th, 1863

The diary opens with the 42nd Illinois Infantry Regiment on the march as a part of Granger's Corps. They are bivouaced three miles north of Eagleville, Tennessee on a rainy March 6, 1863. The next day they marched north towards Triune and then turned west towards Franklin. They camped nine miles east of Franklin. The next day the 42nd moved west to make camp one mile east of Franklin in good weather.

On March 9th they marched 12 miles south to Spring Hill. On March 10th the 42nd marched another 8 miles south when they encountered some Confederates. Skirmish lines were formed but little actual fighting occurred. They camped in the rain. On March 11th they remained in the same position while the Confederates withdrew beyond the Duck River.

Then on March 12th the 42nd hiked 20 miles back to Franklin. On the 13th they marched 16 miles to Triune and on the 14th they hiked a distance of 24 miles back to Stone's River by way of Eagleville.

The Division (Sheridan's) set up at Camp Shaefer two miles west of Murfreesboro where they remained until June 24th. They were occasionally on picket duty near Salem a few miles west of Murfreesboro.

On June 24th the 42nd moved out at 6 a. m. on the Shelbyville Pike to a bridge. There they waited for the 1st Brigade. Then they headed down the pike with the 42nd in the lead. After about 8 miles the 42nd contacted some enemy and formed a skirmish line. Then at about 3:00 p. m. they headed east for the Liberty Pike which was about half way between the Shelbyville and Manchester Pikes. They made about five miles in the mud when they camped for the night about a mile north of Liberty Gap (Middleton??). Grangers Corps moved up to take their place on the Shelbyville Pike while Johnson was up ahead clearing Liberty Gap.

The 42nd did not move much on June 25th. It rained all morning. They moved out in the rain on the 26th but returned to the old camp. Erastus remarks, "This is offell country, hills and rocks are the constituent parts." Johnson cleared the Gap by evening.

On June 27th the Division marched five miles west to the Manchester Pike and then a couple of miles down the Pike. Then they moved right on a road to Fairfield. They made better time as they were the only troops on this road. At Fairfield the troops turned east crossing a stream. After about 8 miles they camped at 10 p. m. Erastus had the ague all day.

On June 28th the Division marched to Manchester and camped just west of town. Now they had a chance to dry out and cook a meal. On the 29th the Division started south in the rain and slowly moved about five miles. On June 30th they were seven miles south of Manchester with their brigade in the lead.

July 1st. The brigade started about 9 a. m. with the 42nd in the lead. They stopped occasionally to form a line. Then Gen. Sheridan checked Tullahoma and verified that the Confederates had withdrawn. He sent a report back and asked the 42nd to be the first in town. They came in at a fast pace getting into Tullahoma at about noon.

On July 2nd the 42nd marched south to Elk River keeping to the right of the main road. They then went down river about 4 miles to a ford. On July 3rd the 42nd moved to Cowan's Station where they camped until July 9th. They took one foraging expedition six miles south to Herman's Spring.

On July 9th the Division marched seven miles up into the Cumberland Mountains to Sewanee where the University of the South is located. They stayed here until July 29th. The 42nd did advance south to a saw mill near Sweden's Cove for a few days and then returned. On July 29th they moved out again by the mill and down Battle Creek arriving at Bridgeport on the Tennessee River on July 31st.

Murfreesboro is a deserted Place no one there but sick Soldiers. It is a small place The S had large Camps here & had them all fixed up well for winter I wonder if they would not like to come here & winter. They intended to attack us at Nashville about the time we started out to attack them. they was confident of whipping us I wonder what they think of it now We took Prisoners that had been frome Virginia but a few days They got Reenforcements every day we fought, but the last. They brought in one Brigade on the cars about noon landed & w[h]iskey issued out to them & then they made a charge on our right about dusk they left the field with about 200 men, So there men say. Well Abe I shal Stop for this. We get but little mail of late. Dr. G run like a . We fought Genral Hardee & Cheatham Pleas excuse this poorly wrote Letter for I have taken but little paines, & I have but little time to write. Abe I hope you are a haveing a good time to Night I feel as well as I could wish & I wish I was with you this evening. Pery Bowen was Killed by a shell after he got to the Hospital. he was wounded at first in the leg & was laying on his face on a bed when the fatal Shell bursted above his head & a piece passed through his boddy nere his back Abe I wish you to let Father have this to read so that I will not be obliged to write it all over again.

Good Night Abe I hope I shal soon be with you. From your ever true Brother

Wm E. Garlock

Write soon & a good long letter

The 42nd Illinois remained near Murfreesboro until late June when General Rosencrans moved against Bragg's Army located at Shelbyville and Tullahoma. Rosencrans slipped some of his troops to the east on a flanking movement through rough country. This maneuver was successful and Bragg withdrew to Chattanooga without a fight. The 42nd was the first unit to enter Tullahoma.

Later in the summer the Union Army swept south of Chattanooga where another major battle was fought at Chickamauga. Part of the Union Army was shattered but General Thomas stood his ground so it did not become a rout. As a result the Union forces retained Chattanooga.

Sgt. Garlock was wounded at Chickamauga. A rifle bullet shattered a finger on his right hand and then entered his side. It would not have been a serious wound except for the danger of infection which made all wounds serious in Civil War times. After Chickamauga the wounded from both sides remained on the battlefield for a week or more. According to hearsay Erastus was treated by a Confederate surgeon who probably saved his life. Hot compresses were used to treat the swollen hand which treatment reduced the swelling and controlled infection.

Sgt. Garlock then spent some time in Union Hospitals, especially one located at Quincy, Illinois. In 1864 he was discharged from the Army-- the wound was on his right hand and rendered him unfit for further service.