

TWO TERRIBLE DAYS.

A Gallant Chaplain Tells of the Stone River Battle.

Editor National Tribune: I joined my regiment in Verulia near Tullahoma, Tenn., just before that noted continuous arch of retreat from the Cumberland mountains, South Tennessee, to Louisville, Ky. My regiment saw fighting at Fryville, but was not in that battle. Here is a wonderful difference in seeing and fighting a battle.

On the night of Dec. 30, 1862, at about 7 o'clock, we were ordered to cross Stone river, having marched in line-of-battle on Stewart's Creek in the afternoon. We were in Gen. Crittenden's Corps, in Gen. Wood's Division, being the left wing of the army. We crossed at the ford in front of Gen. J. C. Breckinridge's Corps of the Confederate army. The camping-ground selected for us was on the side of the long hill-slope about 200 yards up on the river.

As we were forming for camping we were startled. We had run into the Confederate picket post. Their lines and ours are almost together. The enemy fired volleys of some 20 or 30 shots. The balls rick over our heads and came down in limbs or trees. They rattled like hail. We could distinctly hear the commands of officers given in low tones: Fall in, boys! Fall in! Fall in! By the ght! Steady, boys! Fall in! Fall in!

We were within 20 yards of their picket post. We offered no resistance, but only countermarched and recrossed Stone River. We took our position in a little clump of trees along the cottonfield, west of the railroad. There we bivouacked and stacked arms, but did not break ranks. It was the last night on earth of scores of our regiment. Ours and the enemy's pickets were within a dozen yards of each other. Neither pressed for advance, each stood watching and listening all night without a word above a whisper.

On Dec. 31 Col. Wood walked along the line of officers at 5 o'clock, and said in

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a low tone of voice to each Captain: "Get your men up, and eat without kindling fires." By 6 o'clock the Confederate pickets were slowly advancing, driving ours back step by step. At daylight Gen. Bragg's entire army was rapidly advancing on our right, except Breckinridge's Corps.

At 7 o'clock the battle opened with sharp rattle of musketry by regiments, with the terrible roar of artillery. The attack on our right wing was sharp and effectual for the time. It was only checked by moving almost our entire left corps over to the center and right, when the tide of battle was turned and checked along the turpentine and railroad; but not until our army was "half face about," at 11 o'clock. Here at this time nearly 40,000 men on each side were engaged. The full force of both armies was fighting along the entire line-of-battle.

In the afternoon the 15th Ind. advanced, with our left resting near Stone River, with the 31st Ind. supporting Cox's battery, these covering the entire ground occupied by Gen. Crittenden's Corps in the morning. In our front, across the river, was Cobb's Kentucky battery, with parts of Semple's and Shucum's batteries. They did great damage and destruction to our army.

In the afternoon an order came to Col. G. A. Wood to "hold that point at all hazards." It simply meant to defend that spot until overcome. Not to retreat. Not to surrender; but to die on that place. This position was the key to the whole battlefield. It must be held!

Receiving such an order, the Colonel did not hesitate, but sounded the "Attention!" We charged Jackson's Brigade, that was coming about 300 yards in line-of-battle over a little rise of ground along the right bank of the river. They were

met at the crest of the hill and driven back greatly demoralized. Our men then fell back to their former line-of-battle. But soon there was an additional reinforcement to Jackson's Brigade of Adams's Brigade. A second charge was made over the same ground and the enemy driven again in confusion. Soon, from the same place, came another brigade—Preston's. Now the attacking force was 12 regiments—Jackson's, Adams's and Preston's Brigades. A third charge was made over the same ground.

This time the 6th Ind. and parts of Hazen's Brigade flanked the Confederates. And this time they retreated in greater disorder, and gave up "that stronghold," as Gen. Bragg called it in his official report.

In these three charges the distance was 250 yards in advance of our line-of-battle. The regiment captured more prisoners than the entire command numbered in the morning. But it was done at a terrible cost of life. Scores of men of the regiment fell dead and wounded. Bravo fellows; each one was a Spartan.

Here that noble, manly model of a soldier fell mortally wounded—Capt. Templeton, Co. D. I carried him off the field. Near the field hospital I met Surgeon Youart, who administered only opiates. He had no stars; by the Captain, at his request. I received his last request,

and sent that sad message to his friends in Lafayette, Ind. He soon closed his eyes and fell asleep on the battlefield.

Here that brave and dauntless soldier, my neighbor,—Col. E. C. B. Suman,—was shot in the left arm—artery severed, another shot through the shoulder, with a third minie-ball between two ribs. I took it out, dressed his wounds, and pronounced him still worth a dozen dead men. He rode back to his command, and staid with them through the battle.

Among others I carried from the front, dressed the wounds of, or otherwise aided, were Corp'l Logan, Co. B; John Van Note; Serg't Edwards, Co. K; Emanuel Sheldon and Obadiah Vaughn, Co. G; Serg't H. Tullum, Co. C; Frank and Rob Maxwell, and Christian Board, Co. G; John Long, Co. C; Serg't Matson, Co. F; Capt. Joel W. Foster, Co. G; Corp'l Douglas; George Brown; Lieut.-Col. Elias Noff; Lieut. John H. Smith, and Corp'l Calvin H. Zener.

I accompanied my Surgeon, with Assistant Hospital Steward E. M. Burns, to the field hospital. Our work commenced on a heavy task there. Soon after night Surgeon Youart and Burns were ordered to the general hospital. I was left to direct the removal of the wounded from the place. Most of the many scores of wounded were helpless. I took each on my shoulders or steadied them to the ambulances. Carrying was easier for both the wounded and for myself, and was the quicker way. I finished the work after 2 o'clock, then went to my horse, and found my blankets, haversack, rations, and canteen missing. So I lay under the open porch of an abandoned house, but soon found it was too cold to rest or sleep.

I mounted my horse and struck out to find my regiment. It was an almost forlorn hope at that dark hour of the night, with all army lines changed by the battle. But near daylight I found the regiment nearly where I left them the night before, still holding the place, though far better entrenched.

A new deal was being formed for Friday, Jan. 2. Our army took the aggressive this time by moving across the river; the Union army advancing on the corps of Breckinridge with a full-reserve flanking force to support our attacking divisions, and by our front, supported by our massed artillery of 48 guns, in such position as to sweep the entire hill-slope from river to crest of the hill.

Our attacking party was instructed to fall back and draw the entire corps of Breckinridge within fire from front and flank. In one hour's time—from 4 o'clock until 5—the field was swept by the victorious Union forces.

The writer was in the hospital at that time, and saw the battle clearly. It has gone down into history as one of the most stubbornly and hardest-fought battles of the rebellion, not only in regard to the numbers killed and wounded, but also in grit, fight, fall-back, hold on, and victory. —John M. Whitehead, Chaplain, 15th Ind., Topeka, Kan.

[Rev. John M. Whitehead joined the army from Westville, Ind., June 9, 1862, and received his commission as Chaplain of the 15th Ind. from Oliver P. Morton. He was born March 6, 1823, at Richmond, Ind., and comes of distinguished ancestry. His great courage under fire and the magnificent service to his comrades at Stone River are the subject of many testimonials, and the cause of his receiving a medal of honor in 1878.—Editor National Tribune.]

