

Southern Biographer June-May 1885-86

1st Tenn.
C.S.

Archer resisted, because it was significant to him of an epoch in life. He wanted it kept for his children's children. But the next year prices for young groves rose so high Archer was offered \$5,000 for the place, and Judith made him take it, "because it would buy them a nice house in town and save rent."

But the next year the budding trees began to bear, and a part sold for \$10,000. Now, \$50,000 would not buy it.

As for Archer, he gets on very well. But he has a house full of children, and he is often anxious for their future. At such times he thinks of the Cracker girl, and wonders if it

was a mistake. He hears of her associated with art and society; but the pleasantest picture in his mind is the old ragged sun-bonnet, the limp cottonade gown, of the bare-footed girl driving up the cows.

But Judith is sure that all success is due to her, and she saved her husband from sinking into a mere clod by rescuing him from the coarse, manual labor of farm-life; and she tells Cynthia she knows they would have starved, for it is the hardest thing to get Archer to do any work about the house. So it is left to the reader, WAS IT A MISTAKE?

Will Wallace Harney.

A PRIVATE AT STONE RIVER.

IT was on a bright, moonlight midnight, about the middle of December, 1862, that the writer, leaving the cars at Murfreesboro, Tenn., inquired of a man in soldier dress where he could find Maney's brigade, of Cheatham's division. "I can't tell you exactly," he replied; "but I can put you close on to the track of it. If you are ready to go, come on, and we will walk the mile or so; that's on my road, and you won't have to hunt much after I leave you until you find it."

After a walk of perhaps a "mile or so," my companion said: "Your regiment is somewhere over yonder, but you'll have to make inquiries as you go along, because I can give you no better direction."

It was a frosty night; nor was it the writer's first experience in hunting his regiment at midnight. It has occurred to him that the intuitive sagacity which directed a single soldier to his proper command, even in the darkest of nights, was little else than supernatural. Just eighteen, he had seen service for some fifteen months before, and was only too proud, after an absence of some five months, which the Confederate conscript law allowed him, to reenlist for the war, in the same command, and with the same mesmates who had been his never-failing friends.

On that lonely midnight walk he passed many camps, but not one of them gave token where he could find a welcome for the night. It was near to Stone River, to the right of the

Nashville turnpike (looking north) that he found a camp of men, with here and there bright fires still burning, when the impulse seized him, for the first time after he left his unknown guide, to turn to the right. He asked a man, seated by a blazing fire reading a Northern newspaper and smoking a newly-lit pipe, where he could find the First Tennessee infantry. The party addressed, with a kind of astonishment on his face, gave no answer to the question, but jumping up, grasped him by the hand, and leading him to the tent near by, woke up all the "boys" therein with, "Here's Sam." Almost all of those who were sleeping in that tent, as well as the one at the fireside, are now sleeping beneath the sod on the battle-fields of Tennessee and Georgia. About a week after this—a grand review of the army having taken place before President Davis—we were ordered one morning at reveille to prepare for inspection of arms, and to be in readiness to leave camp by 8 A. M. The bugle-call which sounded at that hour was the usual "assembly," the men falling in with good-natured witticisms. But a marked change had taken place in the formation of the regiment. The frightful loss of the First Tennessee infantry at Perryville, and the inability of the Nashville companies to recruit (six out of eleven being from that city), led to the consolidation of the Rock City Guard battalion of three companies into one, while the German Yagers and Railroad Boys were

formed into another. Meanwhile the Twenty-seventh Tennessee infantry, badly hurt at both Shiloh and Perryville, had been merged into three companies, and were consolidated with the First, under Colonel Hume R. Field.

Captain W. D. Kelly commanded the consolidated Rock City Guard battalion, an officer of the most imperturbable coolness, a rigid disciplinarian, and a man of unflinching courage. As the new organization took its position in line preparatory to marching, the writer thought that for general robust health, fine physical development, and superabundant good nature, evidenced by its universal cheerfulness, he had never seen a finer body of men in his life. A short but rapid march of some ten or twelve miles brought us to the neighborhood of La Vergne, Tennessee, where a brigade of infantry, supporting Wheeler's cavalry, had performed its special duty, and was now relieved by Maney's brigade. The retiring infantry was drawn up in line as we approached—the field-officers of each command exchanging salutations—and, as the rear of our column filed past, took up its march to the camp near Murfreesboro. The position we occupied seemed to us a novel one. It was, as we thought, a mere support to our cavalry against the Federal cavalry. Good-humored jokes about "butter-milk brigades" were studiously and unremittingly told. They were not, indeed, believed, but still with all deference to the cavalry the idea among the infantry was almost general, that no number of cavalry, as such, could successfully cope with any approximate number of infantry of equal courage. I firmly believe that, at the time of which I write, if the entire cavalry force of the Union army had presented itself before Maney's single brigade of infantry, the former would have been met by as undaunted a front as if defeat were impossible. When, therefore, some three or four days later, orders were issued for no one to leave camp, and for every one to be in readiness to move at a moment's notice, they gave no more concern than an order not to eat too much. We learned on this same trip that our infantry ideas were a little "too previous," and we gathered a respect for the services of these cavalymen which never deserted us.

The orders to remain in camp were speedily followed by others, to pack up all baggage and get ready to move at once. The casual shots from mountain artillery grew more frequent, and we began to think decidedly nearer. The bugle sounding a "general," the entire

brigade rapidly formed and passed to the front in quick time. We had not far to go. Perhaps half a mile brought us to a halt. The brigade was formed in line on each side of the road. The Rock City Guards, from the left wing of the First Tennessee infantry, were deployed to its left as skirmishers. The main body was cutting down bushes, breaking off limbs of trees, and tearing down fences which obstructed the view. The writer was well near to the extreme left of our skirmish line. His post fell in an open field, with a dense cedar brake about fifty yards in front. The popping of the carbines from the cavalry had become almost general over a front of perhaps a mile, when a sharp and rapid exchange of volleys, followed by a retiring company of cavalry, who formed immediately to our left, gave notice that the infantry skirmishers might have a chance to check the Federal cavalry. Meantime, it had commenced a slow, cold rain. The skirmishers, with guns cocked, fully understood that the next human forms who presented themselves would be enemies, and that no order would be necessary to commence firing. A shell passing between the writer and his next left comrade taught him that even infantry might be killed by cavalry or mountain artillery, and it was only a moment later when he heard his captain speaking to each man just loud enough to be heard, "Fall back slowly and keep under cover."

And so the beautiful morning changed into the gloomy afternoon, the skirmish line retiring just fast enough to develop the enemy's intentions, which had now become so plain as to indicate a general advance, and no determined effort was made to check it. It was well on toward the winter night that the skirmishers who had all day long been slowly stepping back through rain, and sleet, and mud, were called in to pass the bridge over Stewart's Creek—the Confederate artillery slowly firing down the long straight turnpike at the advancing foe. Muddy and uncomfortable, with nothing dry about us but our cartridges, we hailed as a great relief the rapid march toward Murfreesboro, and gladly left to those derided cavalymen the necessary picket duty for the night. We camped, far in advance of the Confederate infantry, however, ready to aid in any defense which might be necessary. As we dried our blankets to secure a little sleep that night, the same messmate who had welcomed my return to the army, said, in a kind of apologetic way, "I'll never laugh at cavalymen

about losing their hats in action, since I saw that company dashing through those close cedars. How they kept their seats is a mystery."

After a little sleep we were again in line. The business of the second day promised to be done under clearer skies. Stewart's Creek, however, with its precipitous banks and few fords and bridges, presented—especially after the rain—a fine place for retarding the Federal advance. The cavalry used this to the best advantage, and Maney's supporting brigade of infantry was withdrawn to the neighborhood of Murfreesboro. Meantime the Federals continued to advance.

The evening of the 29th December found us about a mile and a half to the left of the Nashville turnpike, on the left bank of Stone River. Wither's division of Polk's corps was in our front. McCown's and Cleburne's divisions of Hardee's corps through this and the following day filed to our left over a road at some little distance, but still plainly distinguishable as to their organizations by their well-known battle-flags.

The night before the battle an incident took place such as history seldom records. The opposing lines of battle were very fully developed, and were so near to each other as to be within easy bugle-call. Both armies spoke the same tongue, were animated principally by the same national airs, were commanded in great measure by graduates from the same academy, and were influenced by no other motive but unquestioned sense of patriotism. Just before "tattoo" the military bands on each side began their evening music. The still winter night carried their strains to a great distance. At every pause on our side, far away could be heard the military bands of the other. Finally one of them struck up "Home, Sweet Home." As if by common consent, all other airs ceased, and the bands of both armies, far as the ear could reach, joined in the refrain. Who knows how many hearts were bold next day by reason of that air?

The bugles for reveille on the morning of the 31st sounded before it was quite light. Scarcely ten minutes seemed to elapse before the rattle of musketry, far to our left, betokened the fact that a battle had begun. Cheatham's division in the second line instantly fell into place, the men throwing their knapsacks into piles, with involuntary remarks, such as "You know what that means." The sound became more general from left to right, indicating that

the attack (whether by us or the enemy, we privates did not know) was immediately in our front. As the bugles sounded "forward," the magnificent brigades of Donelson, Maney, A. P. Stewart, and Preston Smith, which constituted Cheatham's division, stepped forward in quick time and perfect order to take their share in the conflict.

The First Tennessee infantry, the extreme right of Maney's brigade, soon found itself on the spot occupied by our front line the night before. To our left, perhaps at the distance of some eight hundred yards, a Federal brigade occupied an advantageous position on the wooded hill, with the wide stretch of open field in their front and left. A Confederate battery, between the gaps of Maney's and the brigade to its right, promptly unlimbered, and, directing a number of shells and solid shot with accurate marksmanship, left some of the enemy dead or wounded at each discharge. Nor were we free from such compliments, although the enemy's fire was much too high. It was while watching the effect of the Confederate shells upon the enemy to our left, and having but little solicitude as to those directed toward us, that the writer, feeling a sharp twinge to the fingers of his right hand, looked down to discover that a bullet had shattered his gunstock taking off half of it between the two lower bands. In a short time the isolated Federal brigade to our left withdrew in double-quick from its position, by the left flank to the rear, the Confederate artillery dropping some at almost every step. Simultaneously therewith, the order was given to the Confederates to move forward, followed by the command to right-wheel by regiments, closing closely to the right. The course of the First Tennessee took us through an old cotton field, passing over the shattered remnants of a Confederate regiment that had been in the original front. Soon we were quite at right angles to the position we had occupied at daylight, and found ourselves with the left four companies in a brick-yard, separated from the others by a pond perhaps thirty yards in width. Immediately in our front was the Manson turnpike, well fenced on each side with high rail fences. I was deliberating upon the disadvantage of climbing them under fire, when, within less than two hundred yards of us, sharply diagonal to our right, came a volley of grape, canister, and shell, from a battery perfectly masked in a natural cedar brake. The men in the left wing instantly laid down in the brick-yard, and any person who has ever seen one on a

winter day can imagine the shelter it afforded. The fire with some musketry was simply furious. The position we occupied was one of the most perplexing and unfortunate in which it is possible to conceive a line to be placed. Subjected to a tremendous fire at exceedingly close range, the direction from which it came impressed the minds of the men with the belief that it was our own friends who did the shooting. Nor were the privates alone in this idea. Lieutenant James, then serving as staff-officer, formerly of our regiment—born in the neighborhood and familiar with the ground—was so thoroughly convinced that this was the case that he lost his life in a gallant attempt to stop it by riding up to the battery. Captain Thomas H. Malone, the Assistant Adjutant-General to our brigade, was, at his own request, sent around our right to make a report. With his accustomed thoroughness he reached a point within some thirty yards of the battery, and ascertained the number of pieces, their position, and the fact that it was the enemy. His horse was wounded, and his clothes received several bullets, but he escaped unhurt. It was not until after his return, when a considerable time had elapsed—Turner's splendid battery, armed with Napoleon guns, captured at Perryville, Kentucky, by the First Tennessee, having opened in our rear, and Colonel Field's clear, ringing command having been given to "Fire on that battery, anyhow"—that the regiment began an irregular reply. Meantime, Turner, with his four guns was giving the Federal battery about as much as it could attend to, his first shell exploding one of their caissons.

Manuel

The enemy, intent on repelling the advance of Maney's brigade, which threatened their rear, concentrated their fire upon its nearest regiment. In doing so, they permitted their own immediate left to become too weakly guarded. The brigade to our right made a vigorous assault. The necessity of meeting these new-comers caused the Federals to withdraw their fire in great measure from us. Promptly at the first lull, the riddle was solved to every one, as to whether it came from friend or foe, by the intrepid command of our colonel shouting, "Forward, First Tennessee infantry!" Every man, with gun loaded and cocked, cartridge-box open, and at the front, instantly sprang forward. The fences which had disturbed the writer's imagination were no longer there. That furious cannonade had left no rail upon another. As we crossed the pike into

the open field beyond, the Federal battery which had been so sorely pressing us was endeavoring to escape over a road cut through the cedars. A gallant brigade of infantry which had been its support, in the most perfect order, and with hardly an attempt to return our fire, emerged from the cedars and was double-quickening diagonally across our front, but increasing its distance at every step. As we came into full view, with no obstructions between us, the long deferred fire from the Confederates became terrific. The retiring Federal infantry, being nearer to us, came in for most of our attention, though the battery, which was trying to escape, received its due notice, especially from the right wing.

The work at this point was short and rapid, and the Confederate fire cool and deliberate. In what appeared to be but a few minutes no foe remained in sight. The line closing to the right, marching by the right flank was aligned anew just back of the ground lately occupied by the enemy. In this position we had a chance to survey the deadly accuracy of the Confederate fire. Stretched before and behind us, in every crevice in the rocks, which seem to be common to all cedar glades, the Federal wounded had crept for shelter. Mangled masses of human forms, torn in every conceivable way, lay scattered in all directions. The rectified alignment of the regiment threw the writer well past the right four pieces of the Federal battery, which stood perhaps fifteen paces in our front. Of the horses which drew these six pieces and their caissons not one was on his feet. Most were dead, and all the rest wounded. When the command "Forward," was given, the writer passed between two pieces and two caissons, the twelve horses and six riders to which—the latter with whips still clinched in their hands—lay dead on each side. And all this had been done by musketry in the short space in which the pieces had been limbered up and were striving to escape. The advance of the First Tennessee infantry from this point was through a dense cedar thicket of considerable extent, through which the enemy's shells came in an almost constant stream.

Volunteers were called for to go forward and report the position of the Federals in our front. Two were selected from each wing, among numbers that offered, who, creeping forward from cedar to cedar, soon returned with information that the woods before us were clear of the enemy, and that across a long open field beyond it the Federal infantry

and artillery were heavily massed. Our line was instantly put in motion, and soon we reached a point near the edge of the thicket, with the wide, open field in front. The course of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad, running parallel to our line, was plainly visible by the mark of the cut through which it ran, while a short distance in front of it a long line of blue coats was stretched at full length on the ground. Our men were disposed to try their marksmanship on the mounted officers behind, but night was so near at hand, and the light so rapidly failing that a heavy picket detail was put forward; our main line stacked arms, and for the first time since daylight acted independently of command. Most of us went to the edge of the woods, but little in rear of the pickets. The latter, unable to restrain a desire to keep up the shooting, or perhaps anxious to drive further away any annoyances which they thought to be uncomfortably close, were popping away at the Federals with a rapidity that appeared at times almost a continuous fire. The enemy, stung by this persistent assault, ran forward at full gallop a battery of six pieces and opened fire. A Confederate battery to our right took in the whole performance. With the most accurate aim the latter burst its shells over the guns of the enemy, driving him from his position so speedily that a cheer involuntarily arose from every Confederate who saw it. Almost at the same instant that the battery withdrew a long line of mounted men, evidently the staff and escort of the Federal commander, passed in full view toward our right. The same Confederate battery sent its shot in that direction. A momentary pause in the cavalcade in view was followed by its speedy withdrawal. But a substitute appeared in its stead. Almost instantly the writer knows not how many batteries turned their rapid fire upon us and the brigade to our right. Perhaps as many as twenty-five pieces sent their well-directed grape and shell along the edge of that cedar brake. So terrific was the fire that large trees were split asunder. Every man hastened to his place, and taking his musket from the stacks prepared to resist an attack which such an outbreak seemed to foretell. It was, however, the last effort of the enemy to secure relief for the night from the galling fire of the

Confederates. With the fading light quiet took possession of that field of carnage, the First Tennessee infantry removing from the position they then occupied not until long after dark on the night in which our army retreated. We were then moved some distance to the right, and halted in line of battle near where the railroad bridge crosses Stone River.

It was in the midst of a cold, winter rain, just before daylight, on the third or fourth day of January, 1863, that Maney's brigade, the First Tennessee in the rear, waded the river on the retreat to Shelbyville. To undress would be to get our clothes wet anyhow, to say nothing of the difficulty which might attend the efforts to pull on wet boots after they had been taken off. We kept our clothes on. The water was up to our waists, and the rain furnished enough more to justify our claim to an orthodox immersion. In this uncomfortable condition we set out on the march of some twenty-five miles, which we made by the next night. During the forenoon a north wind sprang up, and an unclouded sun succeeded the rain of the night before. Under these favorable circumstances the drying process rapidly began.

It is with a feeling of gratefulness that the writer recollects the long halt of several hours which we took about ten miles to the southeast of Murfreesboro. A wide stretch of open country, the view of which for a long distance was commanded by the hill on which we halted, lay between us and Murfreesboro, and secured us against surprise. Maney's brigade was drawn up in line so as to cover any approaches from the enemy's direction. The rest of the army continued its march until not even a straggler was left behind us. Those of us in the rearguard, after kindling large fires, threw themselves down to secure some much-needed sleep. The cavalry was still to our rear. It thus happened that as we had been the first infantry to meet, or rather to watch the Federal advance, so we were the last left to cover our retreat. We were not molested, however, by the enemy, and, taking up our march again at about noon, we reached camp, some three miles from Shelbyville, Tennessee, at nightfall. The rapidly-executed tragedy, which may be called the Murfreesboro campaign, was ended!

Samuel Seay.