

*1<sup>st</sup> Brigade (Willich), 2<sup>nd</sup> Division (Johnson), McCook's Corps*

*Letter from 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Shepherd Green, Company I, 49<sup>th</sup> Ohio Infantry  
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Headquarters 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, south of Murfreesboro, Tennessee  
January 6, 1863

Dear Father:

I will write you at length as I promised, the first opportunity after the great battle of Stones River, and will give you the as accurate an account of the struggle as time, circumstances, and a confused remembrance will permit.

There had been firing of artillery and slight skirmishing the afternoon of the 30<sup>th</sup> and at dusk we moved to our position on the extreme right of the right wing, 3 miles from Murfreesboro Pike, covering the flank and rear. At dawn on the morning of the 31<sup>st</sup> we rose from our beds of blankets and corn blades and began eating our meal of hard bread and bacon. All seemed quiet-not even the firing of a single gun broke the ominous silence. But a few moments elapsed however before the fearful, long pent-up storm burst forth like a destroying avalanche. The immense columns of the enemy came steadily but irresistibly down upon the pickets and battle line of Gen. Kirk who was in front of us. His fire was delivered manfully, and hundreds of Rebels bit the dust, no sooner were gaps made then desperate men filled them again. It was but a short distance from Gen. Kirk's line to our position, and the enemy were soon upon us, yelling like fiends incarnate. Gen. Willich was absent and in attempting to rejoin his brigade rode into the Rebel lines and was made prisoner. Col. Gibson formed the brigade as well as he could and with one regiment covered the withdrawing of the others. About 300 yards from our position in camp, the brigade made a noble stand, and mowed down the advancing for with tremendous carnage. Here fell the brave Lieutenant Colonel Drake while heroically endeavoring to rally his men. Of this brave patriot soldier too much can not be said in praise. The bravest of the brave, the McDonald of every battle, he was loved, honored, and respected by the men and his brother officers, In Lieutenant Colonel Drake I lost a devoted friend, a wise counselor, and one who seemed more a father than a commander. I probably felt his loss more severely than any other in his wide circle of army acquaintance, for he was to me indeed a father, friend, and brother. Could I offer any consolation, gladly would I do it, but the task is too sad a one, and the fresh battle wounds can not yet cease to bleed for the good and brave; but this satisfaction they will have-that he fills a brave patriot soldier's grave, a willing sacrifice to the cause of freedom and constitutional liberty; that he lived as an ornament to society, a bright star in the military firmament of his state, and the service in which he held so honorable a position. Let us cherish his memory as that one of pure feelings and rare courage, who was taken from us by the hand of the All-Wise Being.

We were driven back slowly, terribly before the double lines of the advancing enemy. About 9:30 a.m., we found ourselves retreating across a piece of timber; coming to an advantageous position, Col. Gibson, Capt. Dawson, and other brave spirits rallied the shattered ranks and after the most desperate efforts, we formed in line and with one loud cheer and a terrific volley, we checked and sent the fiends howling back. But new

lines came up and our lines slowly drifted, drifted no one knew where. Seven times we rallied our broken lines and each time made fierce and bloody resistance as the piles of Rebel slain will plainly show at each point. At 2 p.m., we reached the lines of Gen. Rousseau near the Murfreesboro Pike. God deliver me from a repetition of the feelings of those few hours! All seemed lost! Scarcely an old friend or associate could be found. Rousseau was being driven and the army seemed on the verge of ruin! Artillery trains, wagons, rider less horses, ambulances, etc. crowded in one moving mass, rushed disorderly towards the limited bounds of our prison; the enemy was upon every side shouting and yelling like fiends thirsting for blood. An incessant, terrific roar of artillery, and the awful rattles of musketry filled the air and shook the earth. Something must be done and that immediately, or this Grand Army will be lost. It seemed to be beyond human power to avert the terrible catastrophe, but there was giant mind equal to the occasion, from line to line rode the towering form of the general commanding. Where the battle raged the fiercest, there stood the man who managed the workings. Cool, decided, brave in the darkest moments, he seemed to know but one idea. "We must fight to the bitter end." To see him was to feel in his hands that we were safe from defeat. O! Father you can not imagine one's feelings at such a time. I thought the sun would never set upon the heart-breaking scene on that eventful day. There are said to be times when the bravest heart quails and sickens. I confess there was a moment when mine ceased to hope, and its life blood rushed in one thick cold blood to the fountain. I almost prayed to die-to have a coveted death shut out the agonizing fear that all was lost!

That terrible awful day of carnage closed at last, and the two armies lay exhausted on the gray field. All night slow artillery firing was kept up by our batteries to keep the enemy at bay. The sad, sad night passed-we alone knew how. What an eventful New Years Eve! What remembrances were called to mind in the anxious hours of the long, weary night of ceaseless watching!

New Year's Day dawned with the opening of thundering batteries. The sun seemed to struggle in vain to pierce the thick, murky cloud that hung like a pall over the bloody field. At last it appeared, half-hidden by the dense fog and red and fiery as it too had been bathed in the bloody torrent. About this time Rosecrans masked his batteries behind a line of infantry, which gave way before the solid columns who moved to the very mouth of our double-shotted guns. The word was given and whole regiments melted away before a withering fire of canister.

Fighting continued on the front and left all day and towards night, our brigade was sent by special order of General Rosecrans to our extreme right to make a reconnaissance. Arriving about one mile from our right line, at the place designated, we threw out our skirmishers and sharpshooters and discovered the enemy in strong force advancing in line of battle upon Gen. Davis, but seeing their movements were observed by us., they withdrew and sent a regiment of cavalry down upon us., which was repulsed by our skirmishers. We occupied this position until dark when we withdrew behind a cedar grove and slept for a few hours, and never was sleep more thankfully received by tired and worn out soldiers. Long before daylight we were in line of battle, awaiting the storm we expected to break forth. We were drawn up as a general reserve for the center, right or left, as exigencies demanded. About 4 p.m., tremendous firing was heard on our extreme left, occupied by Van Cleve's division. Our troops, again overpowered, were pressed back into camp. Nothing could equal the terrific onslaught! Our brigade was

ordered by Gen. Rosecrans in person to march in solid columns to the point where we could be first under fire, then deploy and charge for life and country. I had some misgivings as to our shattered troops standing another fire, but the firm, steady tramp gave hope and confidence to all. Line after line came out from column in a manner that enlisted the encomiums of the commanding general. Through an open field, exposed to a terrible fire of grape, canister and musketry, the line moved quickly and in perfect order until the command 'Charge!' was heard to the extreme end of the line, and it swept down with a loud cheer, clearing the north side of the river to the last Rebel, save the dead wounded and prisoners.

This assault and defeat closed the efforts of the great Rebel army. Their utter failure seemed to paralyze the very heart of their commander, and they retired sullenly before us.

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