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# THE BATTLE FIELD OF SHILOH.

FIELD OF SHILOH, TENNESSEE, April 14th, 1862.

DEAR KING :—I commence writing you a letter, which, I know, you will be glad to get ; for I mean to tell you what our battalion did on the 6th and 7th inst., whilst the great battle at this place was progressing. \* \* \* \* \* Leaving Columbia, we took up the line of march for Savannah, a distance of eighty-two miles through a country almost uninhabited, and barren to the last degree. On Saturday night we encamped at a place seventeen miles from the latter town. Starting again the next morning, we had proceeded but a little way when the noise of the battle of that disastrous day broke upon our ears. As we advanced the cannonading became each moment more distinct. It was plain that a desperate fight was going on somewhere : but not one of our number dreamed that Grant had been attacked and was at that instant slowly losing ground before the enemy. Indeed the general belief was created by reports brought from the front that our gunboats were attacking some batteries at a place called Hamburg. About noon, however, we began to think it possible that in some way or other our aid might be needed ; for we were halted in an old cotton field, our arms were inspected, and rations and ammunition were issued. Still we were ignorant of the terrible conflict then going on, though by this time the ground fairly trembled under our feet with the rapid discharges of artillery. Again pushing on, sweltering in the hot southern sun, travelling over roads almost impassable and fording several streams, about dark we halted for a few hours at a creek three miles inland from Savannah. There we learned for the first time, that instead of a gunboat bombardment, that day had been fought at Pittsburg

Landing, the bloodiest battle in which American troops were ever engaged. The accounts of the conflict were most cheering. They represented that Grant had that morning attacked the immense army under Albert Sidney Johnson and Beauregard, completely defeating and routing it after a desperate fight of fifteen hours duration. The cannon we continued to hear at intervals were said to be those hurried forward in pursuit of the flying enemy. You may be sure we were jubilant at this news; although we declaimed somewhat against the selfishness that precipitated the engagement and won the victory before Buell's column had an opportunity to take a part. Little did we dream that so far from having gained a triumph, Grant's force was then defeated and panic-stricken, with an insolent foe occupying most of his camps, and that the morrow would introduce us to scenes of carnage the mere imagination of which sickens the heart.

It was quite dark, though still early in the night, when we moved on again. The men were in the best of spirits, rude witticisms, laughter and snatches of song ran along the whole line. Here and there some fellow boasted of the gallant deeds he would have performed had he been in the day's engagement. The officers, on the other hand, were more quiet than usual. They marched in silence or gathered in little knots and conversed in whispers. At length, the town of Savannah was entered. Every house in the place seemed to be illuminated; for each had been converted into an hospital and was packed from attic to basement with the dying and wounded who had been conveyed thither by the steamer.

Groans and cries of pain saluted our ears from all the buildings we passed. Through the windows, the sash of which were removed to give air to the injured, we could see the surgeons plying their horrid profession. The atmosphere was that of a vast dissecting room. The streets were crowded with ambulances, baggage trains, parties bearing the victims of the fight on stretchers, on rails, on rude litters of muskets and on their shoulders, and with batteries of artillery and long lines of infantry waiting to be taken to the scene of the struggle. The confusion everywhere visible, the shouting, cursing, quarrelling, beggars description. Teams of mules, abandoned by their drivers ran away trampling down every thing in their course. Quartermasters rode about at furious pace trying to extricate their transportation from the general mass. Doctors, one hand full of instruments, the other of bandages, and covered with blood, wildly rushed through the immense crowd in search of additional subjects of their art. Still, from all that could be gathered,

the idea appeared to be that we had achieved a great victory. No one could exactly tell the events of the day ; but the fact of our decisive triumph was unquestioned. The falsity of this common opinion every reader of the newspapers already knows. Getting on board the "Hiawatha," by midnight we were ploughing the turbid Tennessee river *en route* for Pittsburg Landing, by water a distance of fourteen miles. From the officers of the steamer we got other accounts of the battle, which we afterwards ascertained to be correct. Their statements were, that Johnson and Beauregard, hoping to destroy Grant before he was joined by Buell, then close at hand, made a furious attack upon him, in great strength, that Sunday morning immediately after daylight. There is some dispute whether or not we had outposts ; those who maintain we had, admit that they were playing cards at the time of the assault. At all events our troops were completely and criminally surprised. Unable to form to resist the onslaught, hundreds of them were mercilessly shot down in their tents and company streets. Those who escaped fled in the greatest terror through the camps in their rear, spreading the panic and closely followed by the successful foe. At least two miles of the ground occupied by our forces was thus abandoned before the regiments near the river could be brought to present a front to the rebels. A temporary check was then given to the enemy's impetuous advance, but being strongly reinforced they pushed our army slowly and surely towards the landing. During the whole day the battle raged with violence. Several corps of our volunteers behaved with great gallantry ; but others ran at the first fire, and with those surprised in the morning (at least ten thousand men), could not again be brought into action. But the Secessionists steadily gained upon us. Seven batteries of our light artillery and a large number of our soldiers fell into their hands, as well as thousands of tents, and immense quantities of Commissary and Quartermaster's stores. When night closed upon the struggle we were driven within three hundred yards of the river, and would have been pushed into it had not the spiteful little gunboats then been enabled to come to our relief. Our loss in the engagement was terrible ; but it was not all we suffered. At times when the fortune of war was most decidedly against us, the skulkers under the bluff, would rush in crowds to reach the steamers moored in the Tennessee, and by jostling and pushing each other into and struggling together in the water, hundreds of them were drowned. Little pity is felt for their fate, of course ; but still these help to swell the casualties of that disastrous day.

Regaled, as we were, during the entire passage from Savannah to Pittsburg Landing, with stories of defeat and forebodings of what would occur the next day, you may be certain that we were not as comfortable as if we were in the old barracks. It was plain to the dullest comprehension that McCook's, Nelson's and Crittenden's divisions of Buell's army, then arrived at the scene of action, would have work enough to do early in the morning, and that too against an enemy flushed with recent victory. It seemed like folly to hope for success; for our strength did not exceed thirty thousand. From Grant's badly beaten and demoralized force we expected nothing, unless it was a mere show of numbers. On the other hand, the rebels were estimated at from 60,000 to 80,000. These considerations did not do much to inspire, whilst throughout the night our anxiety was kept alive, and our consciousness of the immediate presence of the foe not permitted to slumber, by the regular firing from the gunboats upon the camps of the enemy close beside those of our own.

At daybreak on Monday the 7th inst. our battalion was disembarked. Forcing its way with difficulty through the vast crowd of fugitives from the previous day's fight gathered on the river bank, we scrambled up the bluff in the best way we could, and formed in the camp of the Missouri Artillery. Here there were more refugees, their officers riding among them and urging them to rally, but without the least success. I never witnessed such abject fear as these fellows exhibited. Without a single avenue of escape in the event of defeat, they were unable, even, to muster up the desperation of cornered cowards. It is said that several in high command set them the example of pusillanimity. As we moved among them they inquired "what regiment is that?" "15th Regulars," replied some of our men. "Well, you'll catch regular hell to-day," was their rejoinder. Others said, "Boys, it's of no use; we were beaten yesterday and you'll be beaten now." But still our men got into line well, and were marched by the right flank a few hundred yards to the place where the action of the previous day had ended. Here Capt. Swaine and Major King joined us, knapsacks were unslung, and we made the final preparations for the conflict we knew to be imminent. Being informed that we were the reserve of Rosseau's Brigade, we were slowly moved forward in column at half distance, through camps our troops had abandoned in the fight of the 6th inst. Other corps, all the while were passing us on either side, and disappearing from



view in a dip of ground in front, but as yet the engagement had not begun.

Let me try, at this point, to give you as good an idea of the field of battle as I am able. The Tennessee river at Pittsburg Landing, describes a considerable curve; in the neck formed by this bend and some distance outside of it were the camps of Gen. Grant's command. On the morning of the 7th, the rebels were posted some distance inside of the ground formerly occupied by us, so that the line of conflict was pretty nearly straight between the two remote points of the semi-circle. Nelson's division was on our extreme left, resting on the river; Crittenden was next to him on his right, then came McCook in the centre, and joined to him was McClellard, who had other of Grant's generals beyond him. This order continued unbroken until the struggle was over.

Nelson and Crittenden's commands having passed the left flank of our battalion speedily became engaged. A few scattering shots were heard from their direction, which were soon followed by such heavy firing of small arms that it was plain our men had found the enemy. The field artillery also broke in with its thunder, increasing the din already so great that it was difficult to hear one's self speak. As further evidence that the battle had begun in earnest, a mounted officer dashed by crying, "bring on the ambulances," and those vehicles were at once taken to the front, to return in a few minutes laden with mangled freight. Other wounded men, some on foot, others carried by their comrades, likewise now came to the rear. From these we learned that Nelson and Crittenden, although suffering severely, were steadily pushing the rebels back, a story attested by the frequent cheers that arose from their gallant fellows.

A sharp firing that now took place almost immediately in our front, showed that the left and centre of our (McCook's) Division, had got into action, and that the battle was rapidly becoming general. Our battalion was instantly deployed into line to receive the foe, should the troops in advance give way. While in this position, Generals Buell and Rosseau rode up, ordered us to proceed to the right of the brigade, which was the right of the division, and be ready for any emergency, and to send out at the same time a company of skirmishers to provoke an attack. This converted us from a reserve into an assaulting party.

Forming in column by division on the first, we marched by the right flank to the position we were to occupy, Captain

Haughey, with his command, being thrown forward to feel the enemy. (I will state here that battalions of the 16th and 19th regiments U. S. Infantry, the whole under Major John H. King, were with us and shared in all our operations.) At this place we again deployed, then moved by the right of companies to the front, until a little hill between us and the rebels was surmounted, when we were again brought into line. Rapid discharges of small arms forward of our left flank, now showed that our skirmishers were successful in their search. Again we were advanced, until having gained some distance, we were ordered to lie close to the ground. Immediately we were exposed to a cannonade and fire of musketry, whose severity defies description. From three batteries and their strong support of infantry just before us, masked by the underbrush, came a shower of grape, canister, spherical case, rifle balls, &c., that would have swept every one of us away had we been standing on our feet. An examination I have since made of the ground exhibits the fact that every tree and sapling bears the marks of shot. Protecting ourselves as we did our loss was still severe. Among the injured were Capt. Acker of the 16th, killed, and Capt. Peterson of the 15th, wounded in the head. As yet, as I have said before, the foe was concealed in the thick woods so that we could not see them; but now, emboldened, perhaps, by what they supposed their irresistible attack, they emerged from their cover. Never did they commit a more fatal mistake. Our men, restrained by their officers, had not discharged a piece up to this time. But now each coolly marked his man; and when Capt. Swaine, in a voice that could be heard along the whole line, gave the command to fire, our Springfield rifles dealt a destruction that was awful. After pelting the rebels a little while longer, we again moved forward to the sound of the bugle, taking to the earth once more when the enemy opened upon us. Here Lieut. Mitchell of the 16th was killed, and Lieut. Lyster of the 19th, and 1st Sergeants Williams and Kiggins of the 15th dangerously wounded. Halting a few moments to reply, we moved down upon the traitors a third time, subjected the while to a fearful storm of missiles, by which Capt. Curtiss and Lieut. Wykoff of the 15th were very severely hurt, and 1st Sergeant Killing of the same corps instantly killed. But at length the artillery of the enemy, that had been playing upon us so long, came in sight. Hastily fixing bayonets, we charged upon it at a double-quick. Capt. Keteltas of the 15th being then shot through the body. Unable to withstand our desperate assault, the rebel cannoneers abandoned their guns, and with the infantry

supports fled across an open space into the woods beyond. An opportunity offered at this point to ascertain the havoc we had done. Every horse in each piece and caisson lay dead in his harness, and the ground was covered with the killed and dying. Among the latter was the chief of the Artillery. As we came up, he said, "You have slain all my men and cattle, and you may take the battery and be damned." But we had not leisure to stop and talk with him or any other person; for we were already being fired upon from the new covert of the foe. Pushing forward amid great danger across the field, we gained the edge of the timber, and continued the fight in which we had then been engaged for more than five hours.

The foregoing was the state of affairs at high noon. Let us pause a moment to see what was the condition of the battle field at that hour. There was no fighting on the right or centre; indeed it had not been severe in that quarter during the day. On the left, Nelson and Crittenden having repulsed the enemy, were resting on their arms; for the foe in their front had mysteriously disappeared. Our three battalions were the only troops then hotly engaged. You inquire, "where were the rest of the rebels?" That is just what I propose telling you. Leaving only enough of men before the other divisions to mask their purpose, they were engaged massing their troops, those that had been engaged as well as their reserves, for an overwhelming onslaught upon the right of our centre, where we had contested all morning without support. I think it possible that Gen. Rosseau suspected their scheme; for whilst we strove in the edge of the timber, two regiments of volunteers took position on our right, and a section of a battery quietly unlimbered on our left. Scarcely were these dispositions completed, when down upon us came the enemy, pouring in a withering, staggering fire, that compelled the regiments just mentioned to break and fly, in such confusion that they could not be rallied again. This panic not only left us alone to sustain the dreaded onset, but in addition, put us in extraordinary peril by the total exposure of our left flank. The occasion was indeed critical. But before the enemy could take any advantage of the condition of things, Capt. Swaine averted the danger by causing our battalion to change front, thus giving the 15th, 16th, and 19th the form of two sides of a triangle. Here we fought for a time that seemed interminable, holding the rebel force in check, until Col. Gibson's Brigade, hastily brought up to our relief, assisted by a flanking attack from Nelson and Crittenden's divisions, started the foe in the retreat, that shortly became a rout.

Falling back, then, only long enough to replenish our ammunition, we joined in the pursuit, keeping it up notwithstanding our exhausted condition, until we got beyond the line of the camps captured from our troops the day before.

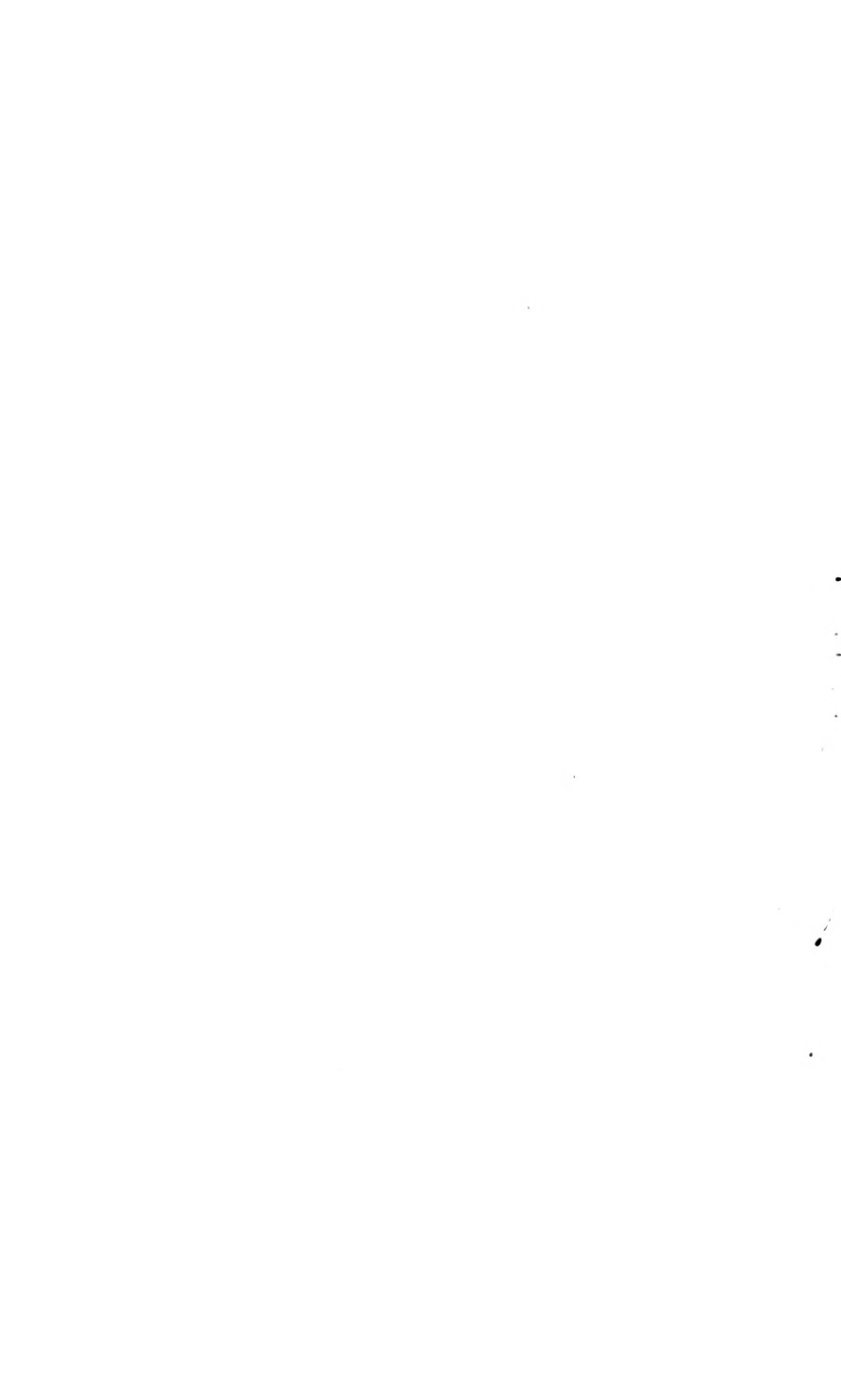
I do not undertake to say what body of troops engaged in the battle of Shiloh, is entitled to the most honor. But I unhesitatingly assert that the 1st Battalion of the 15th U. S. Infantry did its whole duty. For seven hours it fought without ceasing, that, too, after it had marched seventeen miles the day before, and been deprived of sleep the night previous. And when the dreadful attack upon our centre was made, which caused Willich's German veterans to scatter like cattle upon a thousand hills, it still stood up to its work as though there was no such word as defeat in its lexicon. Throughout the struggle, Major King, Capt. Swaine, and the company officers, conducted themselves with great gallantry. In our company, nine men are killed and wounded. The loss of the command is sixty-three. Curtenius escaped without a scratch.

Dr. Parry informs me that our loss in killed and wounded will not fall short of nine thousand men, and may exceed that number. From what I have seen myself, I give the fullest credence to his statement. On the evening of the engagement, the dead were everywhere. There never has been such carnage on this continent. I trust I may never again see anything of the kind.

The battle was fought in the woods, which were as serviceable to the enemy as fortifications. You may travel for a day around here and you will scarcely find a tree, sapling or twig, that has not been struck by a bullet. How any of us escaped is more than I can imagine.

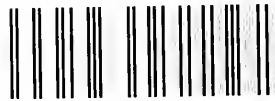
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