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Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States.



COMMANDERY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



WAR PAPERS.
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The Third Day at Stone's River.

PREPARED BY COMPANION
LIEUTENANT-COLONEL GILBERT C. KNIFFIN,
U. S. VOLUNTEERS,

AND READ AT THE STATED MEETING OF MAY 1, 1907.

The Third Day at Stone's River.

While the heroic commander of the Union Army, with fearless confidence in his remaining troops, was hurling the hard-hitting brigades of the left and center upon Hardee's victorious advance during the first day of the fight at Stones River, kindling anew the dying embers of hope in the breasts of the retreating soldiers of the right, and by his exalted courage snatching victory from the jaws of defeat; while Thomas calm and brave, with perfect presence of mind, superintended every move in the desperate game of battle, watchful of

every point, a tower of strength to his devoted men, and Crittenden, more cheerful than usual in the hell of carnage that raged along his front, brought regiment after regiment and battery after battery in support of the point where Hazen, and Hascall, and Grose, and Cruft were clinging tenaciously to their position, and beating back the desperate charges of Polk and Breckinridge, the cavalry were performing prodigies of valor in the rear and on the right. General Wheeler, on his return from his exploits at La Verne, to the rear of Hardee's line on the morning of the 31st, found that the battle had opened. He immediately joined in the pursuit of Johnson's retiring division, while Wharton, in command of ten regiments of cavalry, and a battery of artillery, moved over towards the Nashville pike and turned his attention to the immense supply train of the army. A portion of this train, six miles long when stretched out upon the road, was moving across the country from the Wilkinson to the Nashville pike. The scene was one of the most indescribable confusion. Urged by impending calamity the canvas-covered wagons flew across the fields with the velocity of four-mule power, each driver plying whip and spur; sutler wagons bounding over the rocks, distributed their precious contents along the way. Stanley's thin line of cavalry, stretching from the woods in the rear of Negley to the right and left, rested its right flank upon the Wilkinson pike, where Colonel Zahm, with the First, Third, and Fourth Ohio Cavalry was stationed in rear of Overall's Creek.

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Colonel Minty, in command of 950 cavalry, crossed Overall's Creek early in the morning and took position parallel to and a mile distant from the Nashville pike. The Fourth Michigan and First Tennessee dismounted, formed a skirmish line with Jennings's Battalion of the Seventh Pennsylvania and two companies of the Third Kentucky, under Captain Davis, supported by the Anderson Troop in their rear. Wharton advanced at full charge, after a few volleys from his artillery, but meeting with stubborn resistance drew off, but in a few minutes rallied and bore down, two thousand strong, upon Minty's little command. The Anderson Troop gave way and the Confederate troopers swept past the left. Hastily remounting, the remainder of the command fell back across an open field out of range of the artillery, leaving the train, with fully a thousand fugitives from the battle-field, in possession of the enemy. At daybreak Zahm's brigade was drawn up in line of battle and two squadrons were sent to the right and front to reconnoitre. Soon the cannons' opening roar upon his left announced the beginning of battle. The rush of infantry to the rear gave token of disaster. Now came the exultant shout of victory and the sweeping charge of McCown's columns overlapping Johnson, and appearing on the right of the cavalry. Falling back, Zahm formed in line of battle a mile in rear, where the enemy opened upon him with artillery. The first shell killed Major Moore, of the First Ohio. Again he fell back, when Willich's old regiment halted in its retreat and formed in support of the cavalry, when the two repulsed a charge, but only for a moment. The torrent of fugitives fled through the woods like leaves before the blast, and after them pressed the charging regiments of Ector and Raines' Confederate cavalry in resistless volume. Meanwhile, Wharton's Cavalry Brigade was moving rapidly past Colonel Zahm's right, and the Confederate infantry pushing by his left at a distance of two hundred yards. An aide to General McCook came requesting succor for the supply train moving over toward the Nashville pike. Col. Gates P. Thruston, one of McCook's aides, gave a graphic picture of the capture and recapture of the precious supply train. "McCook's baggage train, starting for the rear, was soon in the hands of the enemy; our supply trains shared the same fate. Gen. Joe Wheeler's command appeared in rear of our flank on the Murfreesboro pike, and all soon became excitement and confusion there. Wharton, after a succession of captures, charged over the fields in rear far down toward our infantry lines, sweeping everything before him. By Rosecrans' orders Stanley's Cavalry hastened to the rescue. There was a succession of conflicts over a wide field, with varying fortunes. The whole area in rear between our right and left was a scene of strife and confusion that beggars description. Stragglers from the front, teamsters, couriers, negro servants, hospital attendants, ambulances added to the turmoil. Wounded and riderless horses and cattle, wild with fright, rushed frantically over the field.

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While in the open ground, moving our ammunition train rapidly to the left, it was discovered by the enemy. In my anxiety for its safety I had already reported the importance of the train to every cavalry officer within reach, and appealed for protection. Colonel Zahm, of the Second Ohio Cavalry as he states in his report (official record), promised me all possible help, and promptly formed his regiment in line for that purpose. Major Pugh, of the Fourth Ohio Cavalry, at my request also placed his regiment on our flank, facing the enemy. The First Ohio and the Second East Tennessee and a battalion of the Third Ohio Cavalry were near at hand.

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Alas, when the crisis came a few minutes later they were not in position to successfully withstand the shock. They were unprepared, and not in brigade line. Wharton's Confederates unexpectedly appeared in great force. His artillery opened fire furiously upon the Fourth Ohio Cavalry, and threw the regiment into some confusion. Soon apparently his entire command charged down upon us like a tempest, his troopers yelling like a lot of devils. They first struck the Fourth Ohio, which could make but little resistance. Col. Minor Millikin, the gallant commander of the First Ohio, led a portion of his regiment in a brilliant counter charge, but had to retire with fearful losses. In the onslaught the dear, fearless colonel, my intimate college friend, engaged in single combat with a Texas ranger, and was slain.

"There was no staying the Confederates. They outnumbered and outflanked us, and, to tell

the melancholy truth, our defending cavalry finally retired in confusion to the rear and left the ammunition train to its fate—high and dry in a corn field. As may be imagined, our teamsters, the train guards, and the ordnance officer (yes, I must admit it), were not left far behind in the general stampede. We fired one volley from behind the protection of our wagons and then hunted cover in the rear of a friendly fence and in the nearest thicket. Our teamsters outran the cavalry. Most of them never reappeared. The Confederates began to collect and lead away our teams and wagons, and our condition seemed desperate, indeed, hopeless.

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“Happily, this appalling state of affairs did not last long. Some of our cavalry rallied, other Union detachments came to the rescue. Wharton had soon to look to his own flanks, and was kept too busy to carry off our train. The conflict fortunately shifted. Capt. Elmer Otis, with six companies of the Fourth Regular Cavalry, attacked Wharton’s command with great vigor and success. Soon two battalions of the Third Ohio Cavalry came up from the rear. I hastened to appeal to the commander to aid our train guard in saving the train, and he at once covered our front and held the enemy in check until our badly-wrecked train, with its disabled wagons and scattered animals was reorganized and put in moving order. We repaired and patched up the breaks. Everybody, even officers and stragglers helped, and nearly every wagon was finally recovered.”

The third attack referred to by General Thruston came from a force that Wharton had not yet met. Before they had time to take advantage of their success, Kennett was upon them. Col. Eli H. Murray, at the head of his gallant regiment, the Third Kentucky, charged down upon the train, sweeping Wharton’s cavalry before him. Here the brave Captain Wolfley, with eighty men, and Captain Breathitt, with his battalion, charged with such velocity as to turn the tide of battle, driving the rear forward upon the front, where the Fourth Cavalry struck it with drawn sabers. The rout of the Confederates was complete. The entire train, with 250 prisoners, were recaptured. The hospital of Palmer’s division, which had fallen into their hands, as well as the Fifth Wisconsin Battery, and one section of the First Ohio, were recaptured, and Wharton’s Brigade routed and driven back two miles. The Third Ohio easily rallied and took part in the fray. Captain Otis’ saber charge was brilliantly executed. Dashing forward with the velocity of a locomotive, the trained battalions fell upon the undisciplined mob huddled together at the head of the train where Murray had swept them in his irresistible onslaught. The train was moved close up in the rear of the left wing, where it remained unmolested during the remainder of the day. In a battle such as that at Stones River, where a long line of troops is engaged simultaneously, it is impossible to give due credit to each regiment that deserves it. The writer witnessed scenes of personal daring which to recount would occupy the night in the description. There were many instances in which officers, casting aside their swords, seized the muskets of their fallen soldiers, and fought side by side with their men. Entire companies fought without officers. In great emergencies such as this there is positively no rank except that which valor bestows. Orders to fall back were in several cases unheeded, and the men held their places in line under the leaden hail, obstinately refusing to retreat. It was not merely a line of battle, but a Nation in arms, repelling, with a Nation’s pride, this bold assault of its rebellious sons upon its life.

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Darkness covered the battle-field. The roar of artillery, the rattle of musketry, the hoarse shouts of command had ceased, and in the silence that followed there fell upon the ears of the soldiers on picket the groans of men in mortal agony lying within the space that separated the lines. In rear of the pickets men sank upon the ground where they stood and shivered through the night without fires, for the faintest flash of light on either side became a target for alert artillerymen. A cup of hot coffee, that *Dominus donari* to the weary soldier, on this night of all nights when he needed it most, was denied him. All through the night the ambulances passed to and fro on the road to the hospitals, where further torture awaited the wounded, unless the angel of death kindly relieved them of the ministrations of the surgeons. A space twenty yards in front of the White House, near Overall’s Creek, was covered with the mangled forms of men awaiting their turn upon the operating tables. Inside were groups of surgeons with sleeves rolled up to the elbows, their brawny arms red with blood, one handling the saw, another the knife, another the probe, while others bound up the bleeding stumps and turned the patient, henceforth the Nation’s ward, over to nurses, who bore them tenderly away. In a corner lay a ghastly heap of arms and legs and hands and feet, useless forevermore. The busy fingers which had indited the last fond message to the anxious wife or mother would never caress them more. Does this horrible recital grate upon the ear? It is as much a part of the history of a battle as is the furious charge and repulse from which it resulted. Forty years have passed since that awful scene was witnessed. The stalwart young men left upon the firing line are old men now, and, in the judgment of some chiefs of bureaus, too old to longer serve the Government.

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The writer, returning from a ride along the lines, where he had been under orders to see that all fires were extinguished, came upon a regular battery, in the rear of which, at the bottom of a trench of glowing coals, the artillerymen were cooking supper. The savory smell of broiling steak and steaming pots of coffee saluted his nostrils. Dismounting, he was at once invited to partake of a soldier’s hospitality. His tired horse was fed, and in a moment he received at the hands of a grizzly veteran a cup of coffee and a cake of hard bread, covered with juicy steak, tender and succulent. His meal dispatched, he was about to remount and ride back to headquarters, when he was asked if he knew where the steak came from. He said he did not, but that it was the best he ever ate. “Come here, and I will show you,” said

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the sergeant. He led the way a few yards distant where an artillery horse lay dead, killed by a cannon ball. His flank had been stripped of the skin, and the tender, juicy steak that had contributed to the enjoyment of the writer had been cut from the flesh.

At army headquarters a strange scene, revealing the characteristics of the prominent commanding officers, was presented. With prudent regard for the safety of his supplies, General Rosecrans had ordered the subsistence train back to Nashville, thus enabling him to manoeuvre his army without regard to front or rear. There was no indication that Bragg contemplated withdrawal, and the prevailing impression was that a heavy assault would be made upon some point of the Union line early in the morning. Where would the blow fall? Would the line at that point be strong enough to resist it? Has Bragg any troops that have not been engaged? Are reinforcements for him on the way? were questions more easily asked than answered.

Mounting his horse, the commanding general rode to the rear, accompanied by General Stanley and a few staff officers. Past the hospital, to Overall's Creek, the group of horsemen pursued their way. In the fields on both sides of the road the darkness was dispelled by bivouac fires lighted by the straggling soldiery of the right wing. Along the pike the long supply train moved slowly and steadily toward Nashville, while here and there a few wagons were cut out of it by a faithful commissary, the contents of which, after a hard night's work, he would succeed in transferring to the soldiers' haversacks.

Walker's and Starkweather's brigades had already passed to the front, where the former bivouacked in close column in reserve in rear of McCook's left, and the latter, posted on the left of Sheridan, next morning relieved Van Cleve's division, now commanded by Col. Sam Beatty, which resumed its position in the left wing. Generals Van Cleve and Wood, each suffering from wounds in the foot, were sent in ambulances back to Nashville.

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Headquarters were located in a double log house, which then stood on the east side of the turnpike about opposite the lower ford of Stones River. In a room on the left hand, General Thomas sat before a fire, asleep; the officers of his staff, stretched upon the floor, with their feet to the fire, were also asleep. Ready at a moment's warning to obey any order that might be given him, the old soldier was snatching a brief respite from care, in the friendly arms of Morpheus. To a question of General Rosecrans, earlier in the evening, he had made the characteristic reply: "The question of retiring from the battle-field is one of such delicacy that I am quite willing to leave it to the judgment of the commanding general." On the right of the passageway a far different scene was presented. General Crittenden paced the floor with quick, impatient stride. "Communication is cut off," said one. "We must fall back," said another, and the words were deliberately uttered by a brave man. "My corps is not whipped," shouted Crittenden, "and we must not fall back." At this moment General Rosecrans entered the room and caught the expression as it fell from the lips of his heroic commander. "Gentlemen, we fight or die right here," said the chief as he passed them and took a seat by the fire.

The sun of the New Year rose bright and fair; an occasional gun gave token of the proximity of the two contending armies. During the night Rosecrans retired his left to a more advantageous position, the extreme left resting on Stones River above the lower ford and extending to Stokes' Battery, posted on a knoll on Rousseau's right. Beatty's division was posted across Stones River on the margin of the woodland that covered a gentle slope from the river to an open field in their front. Across the field, the Lebanon road, running nearly at right angles with the front of Beatty's line, was nearly in sight. Off to their right and front an elevation still held by Hanson's Brigade of Breckinridge's division, was crowned by Cobb's Battery of Artillery. The Confederate line, formed by Polk and Breckinridge on the right and Hardee on the left, extended from the point on Stones River where Chalmer's Brigade had bivouacked since the 28th, in a direction almost at right angles with its original line.

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The body of the brave General Sill was found where it had fallen, and sent to Murfreesboro, where it was buried. At dawn on the 1st of January the right flank of General Polk was advanced to occupy the ground vacated by the left flank of the Union Army. Neither commander deemed it advisable to attack, but each was watchful of every movement of the other. The picket lines of either side were thrust forward within sight of the main lines of the opposing force, on the alert to notify their commanders of any movement in their front. As two gladiators of equal strength, who, having fought until nature is exhausted, stretch their herculean forms upon the earth, each confident that his antagonist is as unable as himself to renew the contest, rise when refreshed and glare upon each other, watchful for advantage, so were these contending armies, drawn up in firm array, weaker in numerical strength, but more compact and infinitely stronger in indomitable will, on the morning of the New Year, each awaiting the order to advance and close in a final struggle. It was the crouching of tigers before the death grapple.

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The rest afforded the weary troops of both armies, many of whom were smarting with wounds which were not sufficiently serious to render their removal to the hospital necessary, fell with the grace of a benediction upon the scene of strife. As the ponderous bells of a great city, at stated periods, rising above the hum of traffic fill the air with the uproar of deep, sonorous strokes, and smaller ones fill with their clangor the intervals of sound, so did the artillery ever and anon break upon the silence with sullen roar, while the sharp rattle of picket firing, now on the right, then on the left, recall the terrible strife of

yesterday and foretell the impending conflict.

Night came, and the contending hosts sank to rest in the mud, upon their arms, in the rear of the stout picket lines, lulled to sleep by the booming of an occasional gun or the report of an exploding shell. The sun arose upon the second morning of the new year and glowed pleasantly upon Union and Confederate alike. The exercises of the day commenced as usual by picket firing along the lines, and was followed by an artillery duel between Estep's Battery of Wood's division and Scott's Battery of Cheatham's division, in front of the Round Forrest, in which Estep was worsted. Bradley took up the gauntlet and was fast getting the best of it when one of the batteries in his rear undertook to throw grape over his head, when he was forced to retire.

Reinforcements now came to both sides and a spirited contest ensued. Stokes, Loomis, and Guenther each in succession took part in the fight, which was confined exclusively to artillery. Robertson's Battery of Wither's division, from its position near the Burnt Brick House, and Semple's Battery on the left, had accurate range of the Union batteries, and their guns were handled with skill. But the artillery fire soon ceased. Chalmer's Brigade had advanced early on New Year's morning, and his skirmishers now occupied the ground which Hazen had so stubbornly contended for on the first day of the battle. Price's Brigade, which assumed its position in Van Cleve's division, now commanded by Col. Samuel Beatty, was on the right of the division.

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The line as thus formed was at right angles with the river, upon which its right flank rested, and nearly parallel to Breckinridge's original line. Below the right of the line the river suddenly changes direction, flowing about a half a mile in rear and nearly parallel with the line. The gently sloping ground was woodland on the right and open field on the left.

To strengthen the left flank, Colonel Grose's Brigade of Palmer's division, reduced by hard fighting on the 31st to 1,000 effectives, was ordered by General Crittenden to cross the river on the morning of the 2d of January. These dispositions were barely completed and temporary breastworks constructed when, at four o'clock, a magnificent sight presented itself. General Bragg confidently expected to find the Union Army gone from his front on the morning of the 2d of January. His cavalry had reported the Nashville pike full of troops and wagons moving toward Nashville. On the return of the cavalry expedition he sent Wharton to assume command of the cavalry on the Lebanon road, consisting of his own and Pegram's Brigade, while Wheeler, with his brigade, returned to the vicinity of the Nashville pike to observe the movements of the Union Army in that direction. Before Wharton had taken his position, the force east of Stones River had attracted Bragg's attention, and reconnaissances by staff officers revealed the line of battle formed by Beatty's division and Grose's Brigade. From the position occupied by this force, Polk's line, which, it will be remembered, had advanced as far as the position vacated by Rosecrans' left on the night of the 31st, was enfiladed. Bragg says: "The dislodgement of this force, or the withdrawal of Polk's line, was an evident necessity. The latter involved consequences not to be entertained. Orders were accordingly given for the concentration of the whole of General Breckinridge's division in front of the position to be taken, the addition to his command of ten Napoleon guns (12-pounders), under Captain Robertson, an able and accomplished artillery officer, and for the cavalry forces of Wharton and Pegram to join in the attack on his right." General Breckinridge was sent for and the object of the movement explained to him. He was ordered to drive the Union line back, crown the hill, entrench the artillery, and hold the position. General Breckinridge was opposed to the attack as ordered by General Bragg, and tried to dissuade him from it, predicting disaster, as the ground occupied by the main portion of the Union troops on the bluff on the opposite bank of the river was considerably higher than that over which the attacking force must march, and it was possible for Rosecrans to mass artillery and sweep the whole field. In urging his opinions he drew, with a stick, on the ground the position of the contending forces. Considerable time was occupied in the discussion, but Bragg remained firm, and finally ended the discussion by an imperative command to move at once to the attack. As General Breckinridge rode forward to his command he met General Preston, commanding his Third Brigade, and said: "This attack is made against my judgment and by the special orders of General Bragg. Of course we must all do our duty and fight the best we can. If it should result in disaster, and I be among the slain, I want you to do justice to my memory, and tell the people that I believed this movement to be very unwise, and that I tried to prevent it."

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To distract the attention from the real point of attack a heavy artillery fire was ordered to be opened from Polk's front at the exact hour at which the movement was to begin. At other points along both lines all was quiet, and at half-past three General Breckinridge reported that he would advance at four o'clock. The effective strength of Breckinridge's division on the morning of the 31st was 7,053. Adding two batteries and deducting 730 men disabled in the three brigades of Palmer, Preston, and Adams, in the assault of the 31st in front of the Round Forrest, left 6,576 infantry and artillery, 3,000 cavalry, and seven batteries of artillery with which to make the attack. Hanson's fine brigade of Kentuckians, who had signalized their valor at Shiloh and Baton Rouge, 1,000 strong, had up to this time been disengaged.

The movement of Breckinridge's command was observed by General Crittenden from the bluff on the opposite bank of Stones River, above the lower ford, from the moment that the advance commenced. To reach Beatty's line it was necessary to cross an open space six or

seven hundred yards in width, with a gentle ascent, in full view from the opposite shore, as well as from the front line of Beatty's division. In the assault that followed a brief cannonade, Hanson's left was thrown forward close to the river bank, with guns loaded and bayonets fixed, under orders to fire once, then charge with the bayonet. This charge of General Breckinridge will live in the memories of those who witnessed it, coupled in precision of formation, in rapidity of movement, and in grandeur of execution, if not in results, with the charge of the armies of the Cumberland and Tennessee at Mission Ridge, the storming of Lookout Mountain by Geary's division of Hooker's Corps, and the no less thrilling spectacle in front of Kenesaw, when the brave and lamented Harker and McCook, with 2,000 men, were launched against a fortified position, bristling with artillery, between the two contending armies. On the right of Price's Brigade the Eighth Kentucky, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel May, received the first attack, made by Colonel Lewis' Sixth Kentucky, Confederate, followed in quick succession by a charge from Hanson's and Pillow's Brigades; then in successive strokes from right to left the blows fell all along Beatty's line. Overborne by the numerical strength of the Confederate brigades, the gallant men of this veteran division, 2,500 strong fighting bravely, were hammered back by overwhelming force. For full ten minutes they stood in line, pouring a galling fire upon the oncoming line, which, leaving its course marked by the writhing forms of its fallen braves, pressed forward, overlapping the right, where they were met by Lieutenant-Colonel Evans with the reserves of the Twenty-first Kentucky, and by Colonel Swayne, with the Ninety-ninth Ohio. These regiments, changing front to the right, held their ground firmly and administered volley after volley upon the skirmishers of the Confederate Sixth Kentucky, who pushed forward toward the ford. The front line falling back, followed rapidly by the entire Confederate line, loading as they retired, and turning to fire upon their assailants, became intermingled with the reserves, when, in a confused mass, assailants and assailed, fighting hand to hand, moved in a resistless volume toward the river. The reserve regiments, the Ninth Kentucky, Lieutenant-Colonel Cram; Nineteenth Ohio, Lieutenant-Colonel Manderson, and the Eleventh Kentucky, Major Mottley, undaunted by the disaster upon the right, advanced through a thick undergrowth of wild briars, and came suddenly upon Adam's and Preston's Brigades, which, driving Fyffe's Brigade and the Seventy-ninth Indiana before them, were moving with rapid strides toward Grose's position on the extreme left. Meanwhile the brigades of Hanson and Pillow had gained positions to their right and the movement toward the ford threatened to cut these regiments still remaining on the left off from retreat. At Colonel Manderson's suggestion, Colonel Grider now ordered his brigade to fall back to the river. Colonel Grider, bearing his regimental flag in his hand, rallied his brigade three times in succession while retiring, and checked the advance of the Confederate line by volleys of musketry. The pursuit of Beatty's three brigades led the Confederate columns to the right of Grose, and as soon as it could be done with safety Livingston opened upon the advance with his artillery, but in obedience to an order from General Rosecrans crossed the river and reopened from the opposite shore.

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The space between the river bank and the ridge occupied by Grose's Brigade was now a scene of the wildest disorder. Instances of the most exalted courage were displayed. It was here that Corporal Hochersmith, color guard of the Twenty-first Kentucky, and Sergeant Gunn, of the same regiment, won the gold medals voted them by the legislature of their native State. When confronted by a squad of Lewis' skirmishers, who demanded his flag, the brave corporal said: "You can take me but not my colors," and threw the flag over their heads into the river, where it was seized by Sergeant Gunn and borne in safety through a shower of balls to the opposite shore, where the regiment immediately rallied around it.

It may well be understood that General Crittenden, under whose observation his old division had been driven from its position back across the river, was by no means an uninterested spectator of the scene. It had all passed so rapidly as to afford no time to reinforce the line when first assaulted, and when it had commenced falling back the west side of the river was evidently the best position to reform and reinforce it. His men had no sooner gained the low ground near the river than, turning to his chief of artillery, he said: "Now, Mendenhall, you must cover my men with your cannon." Never was a more tremendous response to so simple a request. In his report, Captain Mendenhall says: "Captain Swallow had already opened with his battery. I ordered Lieutenant Parsons to move a little forward and open with his guns, then rode back to bring up Lieutenant Estep with his Eighth Indiana Battery. Meeting Captain Morton, with his brigade of Pioneers, he asked for advice, and I told him to move briskly forward with his brigade and send his battery to the crest of the hill near the batteries already engaged. The Eighth Indiana Battery took position on the right of Lieutenant Parsons. Seeing that Lieutenant Osborne was in position between Parsons and Estep, I rode to Lieutenant Stevens, Twenty-sixth Pennsylvania Battery, and ordered him to change front to the left and open fire; then to Captain Standart, and directed him to move to the left with his guns, and he took position covering the ford. I found that Captain Bradley had anticipated my wishes, and had changed front to fire to the left, and opened upon the enemy. This battery was near the railroad. Lieutenant Livingston crossed the river and opened fire again. During this terrible encounter, of little more than an hour in duration, forty-three pieces belonging to the left wing; the 'Board of Trade' Battery, and nine guns from General Negley's division—fifty-eight pieces of artillery—played upon the enemy." The effect of the storm of iron that swept the front of these batteries is indescribable. It tore through the mass of men as they swarmed down the slope, mowing down scores at each discharge. Not less than one hundred shots per minute were fired with unerring aim.

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Branches of trees, lopped off by cannon balls, pinioned men to the earth. For a few minutes they held their ground; then a wild terror seized upon them and bore them away. General Hanson fell among the first. His brigade lost over 400 in killed and wounded; the loss in the division was 1,400. There was no thought now of attacking Grose; there was but one thought paramount in the hearts of all, and that was to get to a place of safety. They no sooner turned than Beatty's men were upon them, pouring in volley after volley upon the retreating enemy. Hazen's Brigade crossed further down the stream; Jeff C. Davis on his left, Miller and Morton at the ford, and moving rapidly forward the line swept up the slope. The artillery fire ceased, and the minnie rifles, taking up the refrain continued it until darkness closed the scene. Three guns of Wright's Battery, abandoned by Breckinridge, to whose division it belonged, stood upon the crest of the hill. The horses, killed by the tempest of iron that had fallen here, lay heaped together; the gunners, mangled by exploded shells, dotted the ground around the battery. As the Union line pressed forward on each side a boy clad in Confederate gray (Private Wright), mounted upon one of the guns, stood guard over the wreck. Swinging a hatchet above his head he shouted: "The first Yankee that touches one of these guns dies." Saluting him with a rousing cheer the line pressed on, leaving this second Cassabianca master of the situation.

Although the Confederate forces, yielding to the irresistible logic of Mendenhall's guns, had considered not so much upon the order of going as upon its rapidity, until beyond the range of the artillery, many of them rallied behind Robinson's Battery and Anderson's Brigade in the narrow skirt of timber, from which they emerged to the assault. The Union line advanced and took position upon the ground from which Beatty had been driven an hour before. The picket lines of both armies occupied opposite sides of the open field, over which Breckinridge had advanced, and darkness covered the battle-field. During the night General Cleburne moved his division over to its original position on the right, in support of Breckinridge, and General Hardee resumed command of that portion of the line.

Apprehending the possible success of a flank attack upon his left, Bragg had caused all the tents and baggage to be loaded on wagons and sent to the rear. On Saturday morning, the 3d of January, the soldiers of both armies had been in battle for four days and nights; their provisions, if cooked at all, were scanty and unfit to eat; their clothing soaked with rain and stiff with mud, with no fires to dry them and to warm their chilled bodies, they had responded with a will to every command. With death beckoning them to his clammy embrace they had advanced with unfaltering tread, leaving their trail marked by the dead forms of their comrades. Even now there was no word of complaint. It rested with the generals in command of the contending armies whether another holocaust of lives should be offered before either would acknowledge himself vanquished. No thought of retreat had at any time entered the minds of Rosecrans, Thomas, or Crittenden. With one exception, neither of the division commanders in the center or on the left wings had favored it. McCook, after his bloody repulse on the 31st, had advised falling back upon Nashville upon purely military grounds, but had readily acquiesced in the decision of the commanding general to "fight or die right here." The fugitives in his command who had not pursued their shameless way to Nashville had rallied to their standards and were anxious to restore their tarnished laurels. The losses during the three days of battle were nearly evenly divided. General Bragg acknowledged a loss of 9,000 in killed and wounded, 25 per cent of his army of 38,250, while General Rosecrans' report shows a loss of 8,778, over 20 per cent of killed and wounded of his force of 43,400. It is impossible to do full justice to the heroic constancy of the soldiers of the Union, whose valor wrung victory from defeat on the morning of the 31st of December, and who all through that terrible day bared their breasts to the storm of battle. To the living the great wealth of a Nation's gratitude is due, but to those to whom death came in the cause of National unity, his

"Voice sounds like a prophet's word
And in its solemn tones are heard
The thanks of millions yet to be."

It came like a pæan of victory to the ears of the long suffering President and to the sorely taxed patience of the loyal people of the United States. It fell with the dull thud of a mortal wound upon the hearts of the Southern people. Gone and forever dispelled were the fond delusions that one Confederate was equal to three Yankees. Henceforth it was known by each that victory would perch upon the banner of the strongest force, and that the god of battle was on the side of the heaviest artillery. As the blood of the martyr is the seed of the church, so was that spilled at Stones River the inspiration by which the magnificent Army of the Cumberland bore its banners through two years more of carnage to final victory. They renewed their vows of fidelity to the flag of their country upon the field of Chickamauga and upon the bloody slope of Mission Ridge, and through a hundred days of battle to Atlanta, at Franklin, and Nashville. Marching through Georgia with Sherman to the sea, the devoted soldiery followed their leaders with unfaltering courage, billowing every battle-field with the graves of their fallen comrades.

Transcriber's Notes:

"Stones" (rather than "Stone's") is used consistently throughout the original text.

The lone quotation mark on page 5 appears in this text as it is presented in the original.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE THIRD DAY AT STONE'S RIVER ***

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