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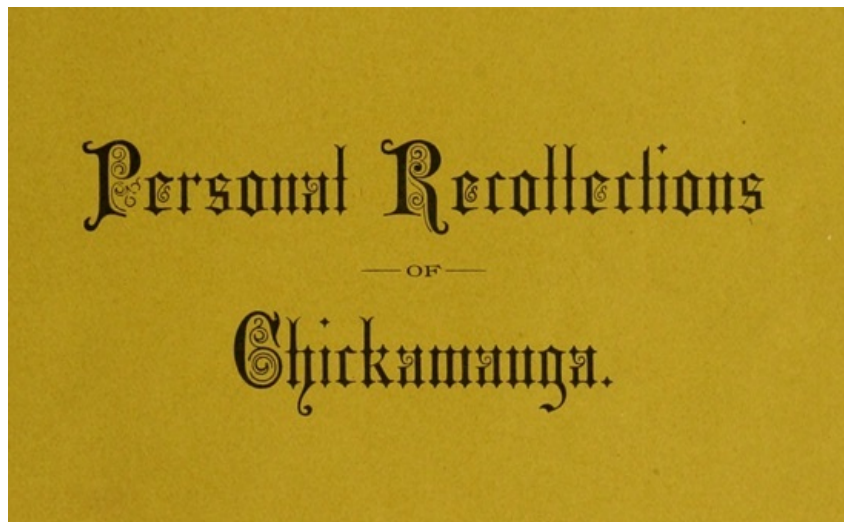
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF CHICKAMAUGA ***



PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS of Chickamauga.

A PAPER
—READ BEFORE—
The Ohio Commandery of the Military Order
—OF THE—
Loyal Legion of the United States,

BY COMPANION
JAMES R. CARNAHAN,
Late Captain 86th Regiment Indiana Volunteer Infantry,
January 6, 1886.

CINCINNATI:
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Personal Recollections of Chickamauga.

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COMPANIONS:

Said an eminent artist, as he stood and gazed on the picture his mind, genius, and hand had wrought—a picture so wonderful in its grandeur, and in the vividness with which the subject was portrayed, “I have painted for eternity.” His picture was but the portrayal of his thoughts, his vision, as the subject had impressed him, and by his act he gave it life, and it spoke, and will ever speak to mankind. So have each of us painted in and upon our minds, pictures of the exciting scenes through which each passed, and of which he was a part, that transpired in our Country from April, 1861, to the close of the war in 1865. Wonderful, grand, heroic pictures they were that were painted day by day through those years. On the brain, the mind, the memory of each of us were they painted, not with the graceful curves, the evenly drawn lines, and pleasing blending of colors given by the professional artist in the quiet of his studio, but in the alarm that came in the sudden midnight attack of armed hosts, the bursting of the tempest of battle in the early dawn, or it was made in vivid coloring as the sun went down and closed a day of carnage and death. The lines are heavy and deep-shaded; the figures stand out as living, moving men and horses; the guns, and cannon, and trappings seem to be real, not painted things. Pictures these are that all time cannot efface, nor is there one of us to-day that would, if he could, blot them out of existence.

The busy marts of trade may shut them out for a while, but ever and anon, in the crowded thoroughfare and in the rush and throng of men, a face meets us that brings to the mind, like a sudden flash of light in the darkness, scenes where that face met your gaze in the storm of battle, the eye all ablaze in the excitement of the hour. A voice comes to your ears out of the noise and turmoil of the crowded city. That voice arrests your steps and causes the heart to leap and throb as it has not done for years. There is a veil over the picture, or it has grown dim from the dust and heat and rush of the great metropolis. But there is something in the tones of that voice that sets you to brushing away the dust from the picture; for you know there is a picture somewhere obscured, and at last it stands out with wondrous vividness on the canvas of your memory, and you see, back through more than a score of years that have passed since that picture was painted, him whose voice you have just heard as he cheered on his men to victory, or rallied his brave comrades for another daring effort to stem the tide of battle that was going against us. And with that voice and face in mind, you see, not the comrades, the companions that gather about us to-night, with beard and hair grizzled and gray, with steps that are halting and lame, but the boys and associates of our boyhood days, with elastic step, and eyes bright with the vigor of young manhood. If these pictures do not come to you with the sun at meridian, they come to you at “low twelve,” as in your dreams you see the columns move out with flying flags and waving banners. You see the dusty roads over which you marched, the streams at which you slacked your thirst; mountain and plain, river and forest, come and go. The scene changes, and you see the lines set in battle array, and follow in your dream from the first shot of the skirmishers on through the various figures of that wondrously faithful battle picture, on and on, until in a shout of victory, or a command for a charge in the heat of the contest, you suddenly waken and realize that you were viewing the pictures you helped to paint on the great canvas of our Nation’s history.

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It is said that no two persons see the same rainbow, and it is especially true that each officer or soldier sees a different picture of the same battle. Each had his special duty to perform, each was to know nothing except as conveyed to him in brief but forcible orders. Theirs only to meet duty and perform it intelligently and bravely; theirs to see nothing except such matters as might come within their observation in the narrow compass of their duties with company, regiment, or command. Each, according to his nature, painted or had painted on his mind each varying, shifting scene through those battles—scenes of battles lost and battles won.

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To-night I propose to give, not a detail of the orders that were issued, nor to give minutely the various movements made, but only to give you the impressions, pictures, if you will, that were made on my mind, and as thoroughly engraven on the tablets of my memory as if written thereon with an engraver’s pen, of that battle that took the Army of the Cumberland into Chattanooga, and though by most considered a defeat and disaster, was in fact the battle that made it possible for us to occupy Chattanooga and hold it.

Leaving Murfreesboro in June, 1863, we had marched to McMinnville, Tenn., and had there spent the summer as one of the out-posts of Gen. W. S. Rosecrans’ army, while the remainder of his army advanced toward Chattanooga. Leaving McMinnville when the time had fully come for the final advance, we marched to join the remainder of the army at Bridgeport. When we reached Bridgeport, however, we found the army had crossed the Tennessee River and was pushing on toward Chattanooga, and followed on. Our first view of Chattanooga was had as our division, Van Cleve’s, of Crittenden’s Corps—the 21st—passed around the point of Lookout Mountain, where it touches the Tennessee River down below

the town opposite Moccasin Point. There seemed nothing specially inviting to us in the little old town off to our left; in fact, the invitation came to us to go in another direction. Obeying the order we there received, we hastened away up the valley toward Rossville, and on toward Ringgold, in pursuit of Bragg, who was at the time reported to be retreating before Rosecrans' army. On we pushed, joining the remainder of our corps and the cavalry at Ringgold. It was a delightful march; the roads were smooth, the weather was perfect, the enemy kept out of our way, and, in fact, we felt as though now there would be no more serious fighting. Had we not driven the Confederate army out of Kentucky, had whipped it at Stone River, and driven it all the way down from Murfreesboro, and out of their stronghold—Chattanooga—and were yet in pursuit? Certainly the war would soon be over. So the men thought and talked. When we reached Ringgold, we found, for some reason not clearly defined in words, that we would not advance any further in that particular direction. In fact, it was deemed advisable that our corps should advance (?) over the same route by which we had come, back up into Lookout Mountain valley. Two weeks in that pleasant early autumn of 1863 we spent somewhat after the manner described in the old song, we

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“Marched up the hill, and then marched down again.”

We made a reconnoissance now here, now there, each time becoming more and more convinced that Gen. Bragg was in no very great hurry to get away, and speedily end the war; in fact, we became fully persuaded that he preferred to remain in our immediate front; nay, more, we were fast making the discovery that the enemy was for some reason becoming more and more aggressive. The reconnoissance that was made by the Third Brigade of Van Cleve's Division on Sunday, September 13th, beyond Lee & Gordon's mills, developed the fact that the enemy's lines were stronger than ever before, and that all our efforts to dislodge him were in vain. That the Confederates were receiving reinforcements could not be longer doubted, and that a battle was imminent was now apparent to all; just where or when, whether our army would make the attack or be attacked, were the unsolved questions of the problem. Each day, as it came and passed, seemed to bring to all a more certain conviction that the conflict, when or wheresoever it should come, would be a most terrible one. In this uncertainty, and with certain feverish restlessness that is always engendered in anticipation of a battle, the 21st Corps lay about Crawfish Springs and Lee & Gordon's mills. Extra ammunition had been issued to the troops as a precaution against any emergency that might arise. Each company officer had received orders to keep his men in camp; the horses of the artillery stood harnessed; everything seemed to be in readiness, come what might. Such was the condition of affairs with our portion of the army on Friday, the 18th of September, 1863. The forenoon of that day had been spent in general talk, both among officers and among men, on the now all-absorbing question as to the probabilities of a battle. Our brigade, the Third, commanded by Col. Geo. F. Dick, of the 86th Indiana, lay near Crawfish Springs. We had just finished our noon-day meal and pipes were lighted, and we were preparing to spend the hours of the afternoon as best we might, when we caught the sound of a distant artillery shot off toward Ringgold. This proved to be the first shot of what was so soon to be the battle of Chickamauga. The shots grew in number, and more and more distinct. It required but little time for each officer and soldier to take in the situation and realize the condition of affairs. We knew from the sounds that were borne to us that the army of Gen. Bragg had ceased to retreat and to act on the defensive, and was now advancing upon our army. This action was proof that the enemy had been largely reinforced, and now felt itself not only able to meet us in battle, but confident in its ability to defeat and put us to rout, and to recover all they had lost.

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Not much time was given for thought or talk before our brigade was ordered to “fall in,” and we were moved out down to the left, and past Lee & Gordon's mills, to the relief of our hard-pressed cavalry, now falling back onto our main army. How urgent the need of assistance to our cavalry we soon learned as we saw them coming in wounded and broken, riderless horses, ambulances filled with wounded and dying—all coming together told how fierce the onslaught that had been made on them, and they who were yet unwounded were contesting, with all the bravery and stubbornness that men could, every part of the distance that lay between us and the enemy. Our lines were formed, and we moved forward, checking the enemy's advance for the day. Our skirmish line and pickets were strengthened, and our brigade remained on duty through the night, and listened to the ominous sounds that came to us through the darkness, the distant rumbling of artillery wheels, the sound now and then of axes, all telling us of the preparations that were being made, and the perfecting of plans for the terrible contest of the morrow.

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In the early morning of the 19th we were relieved from duty, and were sent back toward Lee & Gordon's mills, into an open field, there to prepare our breakfasts and get such sleep and rest as we could, until such time as our services would be demanded. The sun had scarcely appeared when a shot was heard over on the right of our line; in a short time another, as if one army or the other were feeling its way. Soon another shot, which brought an answering shot; then came the opening artillery duel that seemed to shake the very earth. From this, shots came from all along our lines, showing that the enemy had got well into position along our entire front during the night. Now the firing increases on our right, and between the artillery shots we catch the sound of musketry; stronger and stronger the contest grows, and nearer, too, for now comes one continuous roar of artillery from the right, and volley after volley of musketry tells that the two armies have come together in the first charges of the battle. The contest gathers in strength, starting down from the right, on it comes to the lines

in our front, and on past us toward the left, until at length it becomes one commingled roar of artillery and rattle of musketry from right to left. We see none of the lines engaged, but it must be that the Union army is holding its position against the furious charges that are being made upon it. A lull for a few moments comes in the contest, and you hear only scattering shots along the line; but looking off to our front, through an opening in the trees, could be seen, crossing the ridge, the marching columns of the enemy as they moved toward our left, preparatory to the terrible work of that Saturday afternoon. Again the sound of the contest begins to gather and grow in strength. It comes on like the blasts of the tornado, sounding louder and louder, growing stronger and stronger until it comes in a great rush and roar of sound, before which those who hear and are not of it stand in awe and look each the other in the face, but dare not speak. Over on the right it again breaks forth, and with renewed strength rolls on down the lines, growing fiercer and fiercer, and louder and louder, as additional forces are brought into the contest, until it reaches the extreme left, when backward it would sweep again to the right, only again to go rolling, and jarring, and crashing in its fury as backward and forward it swept. It was as when the ocean is lashed to fury by the tempest, when great rolling waves come chasing one the other in their mighty rage, until they strike with a roar upon the mighty cliffs of stone, only to be broken and driven back upon other incoming waves as strong, or stronger, than they had been, so came to our ears the sound of that mighty tempest of war—volley after volley of musketry rolling in waves of dreadful sound, one upon the other, to which was added the deep sounding crash of the artillery, like mighty thunder peals through the roar of the tempest, making the ground under your feet tremble as it came and went, each wave more terrible than the former.

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It was evident to those of us who listened that the enemy was making desperate efforts to overwhelm and break our lines.

Through that forenoon—and oh, how long it seemed—we waited outside the contest, and heard that mighty, that terrible tornado of war as it raged in our front and all about us, and saw the constantly moving columns of the enemy's infantry, with flying flags, and saw battery after battery as they moved before us like a great panorama unfolding in the opening to which I have referred. We had been sent back, as I have said, to rest after a night on duty, but rest there was none. The guns were stacked in line, and the battery attached to our brigade stood just in the rear of us, with horses hitched to guns and caissons, ready to move any instant. Now and then a stray shot or shell would fly over us, and strike in the ground or burst in the air, to our rear.

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Our men grow restless, that restlessness that comes to men in that most trying of all times in the life of a soldier, when he hears the battle raging with all the might of the furies about him, when he can now and then catch the sound of the distant shouts that tell that the charge is being made, and can hear above the shouts the rattling, tearing, shrieking sound of the volleys of musketry, and the shot and shell and canister of the artillery that tells too well that the charge is met, and that great gaps are being made in the lines; that men and comrades are being maimed, and wounded, and killed. In such moments as these, when you see and hear, but are not a part of the battle, men grow pale and lose their firmness, their nerve; then it is they realize that war is terrible. They are hungry, but they cannot eat; they are tired but they cannot sit down; they lay prone upon the ground, but that is worse than standing, and they rise again; you speak to them, and they answer you as one who is half asleep; they laugh, but it is a laugh that has no joy in it. The infantrymen stay close to their muskets; the artillerymen, drivers, and gunners stand close to their posts of duty in a terrible, fearful state of nervous unrest. These men whom you thus see on that fearful September afternoon are not lacking in all true soldierly qualities; their bravery had been tested on other fields—at Donelson, at Shiloh, at Perryville, and at Stone River they met the enemy in the hottest of the battle with all the bravery and firmness of the Roman, and now when the time shall come for them to be ordered to the aid of their comrades, they will not be found wanting. Thus hour after hour has passed for us in this fearful state of anxiety and suspense. No tidings from the front; we only know that the battle is fearful, is terrible.

Noonday has passed, when suddenly from out the woods to our front and left onto the open field, dashes an officer, his horse urged to its greatest speed toward our command. The men see him coming, and in an instant they are aroused to the greatest interest. "There comes orders" are the words that pass from lip to lip along that line. Without commands the lines are formed behind the gun stacks; the cannoneers stand by their guns; the drivers stand with hand on rein and foot in stirrup, ready to mount. How quick, how great the change at the prospect of freedom from the suspense of the day. The eye lights up, the arm again grows strong, and the nerves are again growing steady; every head is bent forward to catch, if possible, the first news from the front, and to hear the orders that are to be given. All now are roused: there is to be no more suspense; it is to be action from now and on until the battle shall close. Nearer and nearer comes the rider; now you catch his features, and can see the fearful earnestness that is written in every line of the face. He bends forward as he rides, in such haste he is. The horse he rides seems to have caught the spirit of the rider, and horse and rider tell to the experienced soldier that there is to be work for us; that the urgency is great, and that the peril is imminent.

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How much there is of life, of the soldier's life, that cannot be painted on canvas or described in words; it is the inexpressible part—the face, the eye, the swaying of the body, the gesture

of the hand, the movement of the head, as the officer, the soldier, feels that his comrades are in deepest peril, and that unless help comes, and comes quickly, all hope is gone. He speaks not a word, but his appearance speaks in thunder tones. Companions, you, and each of you, have seen just such times and such faces. Such was the face, and such the action of that staff officer that afternoon of September 19, 1863; and every soldier, as he saw him, read that face and form as though it were an open book—yes, and read it in all its awful, dreadful meaning—and, reading, realized their full duty. He reaches our line, and is met by our brigade commander, Col. Geo. F. Dick, as anxious to receive the orders as he is to give them. The command comes in quick, sharp words: "The General presents his compliments, and directs that you move your brigade at once to the support of Gen. Beard. Take the road, moving by the flank in 'double quick' to the left and into the woods, and go into line on the left of Gen. Beatty's brigade. I am to direct you. Our men are hard pressed." The last sentence was all that was said in words as to the condition of our troops, but it told that we had read aright before he had spoken.

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Scarce had the order been delivered when the command to "take arms" is heard along the line, and to drivers and cannoneers to mount. It scarcely took the time required to tell it for our brigade to get in motion, moving off the field, the artillery taking the wagon road, the infantry alongside. It was a grand scene as we moved quickly into place, closing up the column and waiting but a moment for the command. The guns are at a right shoulder, and all have grown eager for the order, "Forward." The bugle sounds the first note of the command. Now look along that column; the men are leaning forward for the start; you see the drivers on the artillery teams tighten the rein in the left hand, and, with the whip in the uplifted right arm, rise in their stirrups; and as the last note of the bugle is sounded, the crack of the whips of thirty-six drivers over the backs of as many horses, and the stroke of the spurs, sends that battery of six guns and its caissons rattling and bounding over that road, while the infantry alongside are straining every nerve as they hasten to the relief of the comrades so hard pressed. The spirits of the men grow higher and higher with each moment of the advance. The rattling of the artillery and the hoof beats of the horses add to the excitement of the onward rush, infantry and artillery thus side by side vieing each with the other which shall best do his part. Now, as we come nearer, the storm of the battle seems to grow greater and greater. On and yet on we press, until reaching the designated point, the artillery is turned off to the left on to a ridge, and go into position along its crest, while the lines of the infantry are being formed to the right of the road over which we have just been hurrying. Our lines are scarcely formed, and the command to move forward given, when the lines which are in advance of us are broken by a terrific charge of the enemy, and are driven back in confusion onto our line—friend and foe so intermingled that we cannot fire a shot without inflicting as much injury on our men as upon the enemy.

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Our artillery, on the crest of the ridge back of us, have unlimbered and gone into action, and their shell are now flying over our heads into the woods, where the enemy's lines had been. Confusion seems to have taken possession of our lines, and, to add to it, the lines to our right have been broken and the enemy are sweeping past our flank. The order is given to fall back on line with the artillery. Out of the wood, under the fire of our cannon, the men hasten. Now on the crest of that ridge, without works of any kind to shelter them, our troops are again hastily formed, and none too soon. Down the gentle slope of that ridge, and away to our right and left and front stretches an open field, without tree or shrub to break the force of the balls. In our front, and at the edge of the field, two hundred yards away, runs the road parallel with our lines; beyond the road the heavy timber where the Confederate lines are formed, and well protected in their preparations for their charge. Scarce had our lines been formed when the sharp crack of the rifles along our front, and the whistling of the balls over our heads, give us warning that the advance of the enemy has begun, and in an instant the shots of the skirmishers are drowned by the shout that goes up from the charging column as it starts down in the woods. Our men are ready. The 7th Indiana Battery—six guns—is on the right of my regiment; Battery M, 4th U. S. Artillery, is on our left. The gunners and every man of those two batteries are at their posts of duty, the tightly drawn lines in their faces showing their purpose there to stand for duty or die. Officers pass the familiar command of caution along the line—"Steady, men, steady." The shout of the charging foe comes rapidly on; now they burst out of the woods and onto the road. As if touched by an electric cord, so quick and so in unison was it, the rifles leap to the shoulder along the ridge where waves the stars and stripes. Now the enemy are in plain view along the road covering our entire front; you can see them, as with cap visors drawn well down over their eyes, the gun at the charge, with short, shrill shout they come, and we see the colors of Longstreet's corps, flushed with victory, confronting us. Our men recognize the gallantry of their foe, and their pride is touched as well. All this is but the work of an instant, when, just as that long line of gray has crossed the road, quick and sharp rings out along our line the command "Ready," "Fire!" It seems to come to infantry and artillery at the same instant, and out from the rifles of the men and the mouths of those cannons leap the death-dealing bullet and canister; again and again, with almost lightning rapidity, they pour in their deadly, merciless fire, until along that entire ridge it has become almost one continuous volley. Now that Corps that had known little of defeat begins to waver; their men had fallen thick and fast about them. Again and yet again the volleys are poured into them, and the artillery on our right and left have not ceased their deadly work. No troops can long withstand such fire; their lines waver, another volley and they are broken and now fall back in confusion. The charge was not long in point of time, but was terrible in its results to the

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foe.

Along the entire line to our right and left we can hear the battle raging with increased fury. We are now on the defensive; and all can judge that the lull in our front is only the stillness that forbodes the more terrible storm that is to come. A few logs and rails are hastily gathered together to form a slight breastwork. Soon the scattering shots that began to fall about us gave us warning that our foe was again moving on us. Again we are ready, now laying behind our hastily-prepared works. Again we hear the shout as on they come with more determination than before; but with even greater courage do our men determine to hold their lines. The artillery is double shotted with canister. Again the command, "Fire!" and hotter, fiercer than before the battle rages along our front. Shout is answered with shout, shot by shots tenfold, until again our assailants break before our fire and are again forced back. But why repeat further the story of that Saturday afternoon. Again and again were those charges repeated along our line, only to be hurled back—broken and shattered. It did seem as though our men were more than human. The artillerymen worked as never before. Their guns—double shotted—had scarce delivered their charges, and before the gun could complete its recoil, was caught by strong arms, made doubly strong in that fever heat of battle; was again in position, again double shotted, and again fired into the face of the foe. The arms bared, the veins standing out in great strong lines, the hat or cap gone from the head, the eye starting almost from the socket, the teeth set, the face beaded with perspiration, balls falling all about them, those men of the 7th Indiana Battery and Battery M seemed to be supernaturally endowed with strength. Their comrades of the infantry vied with them in acts of heroism, and daring, and endurance. They shouted defiance at the foe with every shot; with face and hands begrimed in the smoke and dust and heat of the battle; with comrades falling about them, the survivors thought only of vengeance. All the horses on two of the guns of the 7th Indiana Battery are shot down; another charge is beginning; those two guns might be lost; they must be gotten back. Quick as thought a company of infantry spring to the guns, one hand holding the rifle, the other on the cannon, and with the shot falling thick and fast in and about them, drag the guns over the brow of the ridge and down into the woods, just in the rear of our lines, and hasten back again to take their places in line, ready to meet the on-coming charge. An artilleryman is shot down; a man from the infantry takes his place and obeys orders as best he can. When the charge begins our men are lying down. Now, in the midst of it, so great has become the excitement, so intense the anxiety, all fear and prudence vanishes, and the men leap to their feet, and fire and load, and fire and load, in the wildest frenzy of desperation. They have lost all ideas of danger, or the strength of the assailants. It was this absolute *desperation* of our men that held our lines. A soldier or officer is wounded; unless the wound was mortal or caused the fracture of a limb, they had the wound tied or bandaged as best they could, some tearing up their blouses for bandages, and again took their places in the lines beside their more fortunate comrades. Each man feels the terrible weight of responsibility that rests on him personally for the results that shall be achieved that day. It is this thought, this decision, this purpose and grand courage that comes only to the American Citizen Soldier, who voluntarily and with unselfish patriotism stands in defense of principle and country, that makes such soldiers as those who fought in our ranks that day. On through the afternoon until nightfall did that furious storm beat against and rage about us.

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Near night, Gen. J. J. Reynolds, who commanded that portion of the line immediately on our left, informed us that the lines to our right and left had been broken, and directed that we should fall back to the range of hills in our rear; and so, reluctantly, our men fell back after an afternoon in which they had helped to hold at bay the flower of the "Army of Northern Virginia" and of the Confederacy; and though suffering terribly in loss of men, our portion of the line had not lost a flag nor a gun.

A night of pinching cold with but little sleep illly fitted us for the duty that was to be ours after the Sabbath morning's sun should rise. With the morning and our hastily prepared breakfast came the question, everything then being so still, "Will there be fighting to-day? This is Sunday." If there had been a faint hope that the army would rest on its arms that bright Sabbath morning, it was of short life, for soon the order came for an advance; and when it came there were no laggards found. Soldiers never obeyed more promptly, nor with more ready spirit than was that order obeyed. We had learned during the evening and night from various sources that the battle of Saturday had gone hard with some portions of our lines where the enemy had massed his troops most heavily, and our men joined in the desire to retrieve all that had been lost. We moved out in line of battle with our skirmishers advanced, passing over a portion of the field that had been so hotly contested the day before. Soon the shots of the skirmishers warn us that work is before us; nor is it long until the skirmishers have pushed to their furthest limit, and the line of battle joins them. The command for the charge is given, and, with a shout that might have come from ever-victorious troops, we dash upon their lines. Stubborn is the resistance, but impetuous and determined is the charge, comrade cheering comrade on—on with a fury that cannot be withstood; the air filled with leaden hail; men falling about us on every side; but on and on they push until at last the enemy's lines are broken, and we follow in hot pursuit, driving them back until they reach a line of reinforcements. Again the battle rages; now with redoubled lines they charge upon us, and the very earth shakes under our feet from the terrible discharge that comes from artillery massed in our front. Shells are shrieking in the air and bursting over our heads; great limbs are torn from the trees and fall with the broken shells about us. Soon our lines are weighed down with the terrible onslaught, and we are

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driven back over the same ground over which we had just come. Again our lines are rallied, and reformed, and strengthened; and again we charge to recover the lost ground. Four times that Sunday forenoon did our lines sweep down over that ground, and as many times were we driven back, until the ground was almost covered with friend and foe—the blue and the gray lying side by side, wounded, dying, and dead. Coming to us even in the heat and excitement of the battle, it was a terrible and sickening sight to see that battle field that day. As often as our lines were broken and driven back, so often did they rally and renew the attack, until again broken and forced back, turning and firing into the face of the foe as they went, until some soldier or officer would stop, and, with a brave and determined purpose, swear that there he would stand or die, as he turned his face once more to the enemy; and from that stand, so desperately and fearlessly made, calling on his comrades to “fall in,” our lines would, almost as if by magic, be built out to right and left. Those coming back would of their own volition halt and face about, and those who had passed beyond would, as soon as they found the line was reforming, hasten to rejoin it. But words would fail to tell of the many acts of heroism displayed on that field that day. How men fought singly from behind trees, in groups of from two to a dozen, desperately fighting, hoping against hope. The very desperation and fury with which these scattered few would fight—checking the enemy, detaining him, and giving us time to reform our broken lines—surpassed the stories of Napoleon’s old guard. Flanked by the enemy, our lines would change front under the murderous fire of a foe greatly superior in numbers, and again confront him in the new direction. From hastily constructed breastworks we fought now on this side, now on that. No man was there who did not realize that we were greatly outnumbered; yet no one thought of ultimate defeat. Chickamauga was a battle where officers and men were all and each alike—heroes of the noblest type. If never before, on that battle field of Chickamauga, men of the North and men of the South, Union and Confederate, learned that no imaginary lines separating North from South, or marking the boundary of States, make any difference in the spirit of courage, bravery, and daring of the American soldier, once he believes he is fighting for a principle, be that principle right or wrong. If one is more impetuous, the other will endure longer; if one is proud of his section, the other loves his whole country more. The two, united as they should be and will be, combine the elements and qualities of an army on whose banners might be emblazoned the one word “Invincible.”

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On and on through all the morning and late into the afternoon had the battle raged, now advancing, now retreating, so evenly did the honors rest, that now both armies seemed willing to rest on their arms. Gradually the firing began to die away, and soon almost ceased on our portion of the line. Late in the afternoon we commenced a movement by the flank, but so confused had we become in our bearings that we did not realize that it was to be anything more than a mere change of position for a renewal of the conflict, when after a short while we found ourselves out of the noise and din of the battle field on the road filled with our troops, and marching with them down past Rossville toward Chattanooga. Then it was that we learned that Chickamauga was, *not a defeat*, but what seemed at the time a great disaster to the Union Army. And such it really was in point of munitions of war that were lost, and the great numbers of Union soldiers that fell wounded or dead. But a defeat it was not; and had the battle been fought at Chattanooga instead of Chickamauga, Chattanooga would have been lost to us, and disaster overwhelming and crushing would have been the fate of the Army of the Cumberland. Had we halted at Chattanooga instead of marching out to Chickamauga, even though McCook had been with us, we might have had Vicksburg reversed.

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I do not believe there was a man who remained in the front fighting on the Sunday of Chickamauga who thought of defeat, so little do they who are in the line know of the actual state of affairs in active army life.

We bivouacked around Rossville on Sunday night, and as we gathered in groups about our camp-fires that night, we talked of the scenes of the day or mourned the loss of the comrades who had fallen, and all discussed the probabilities of the morrow on another field, confident of ultimate success. The morning found our portion of the army moving back toward Chattanooga, our companies and regiments intact, except for the actual losses of the battle field. Through the afternoon of that day we listened to the distant rumble and roar of the guns of the 14th Army Corps, sounding like the last mutterings of a great storm that had spent its strength, and was drawing to a close from sheer exhaustion. As proof of the fact that Chickamauga was not a defeat, we have the fact that Gen. Geo. H. Thomas, one of the grandest heroes and noblest men developed by the war, was able with a single corps to hold the entire army of Bragg at bay until our lines were established in and about Chattanooga. Nor was Bragg’s army able to follow up the advantage gained at Chickamauga. He had been able only to check our further advance, but not to drive us back from Chattanooga. The bravery of our men at Chickamauga was fully equaled by their patience and endurance of the siege of Chattanooga—a siege for two long months that were full of all that goes to make the soldier’s life something to be dreaded, except for a noble and holy cause.

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF
CHICKAMAUGA ***

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