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Personal Recollections of the Chickamauga Campaign.

BY

FIRST LIEUTENANT GRANVILLE C. WEST,
U. S. Volunteers.

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Personal Recollections of the Chickamauga Campaign.

It is my purpose in this paper to give my personal recollections of what I saw and heard, and part of which I was in the Chickamauga campaign, one of the most remarkable and complicated campaigns in history, and it would be so shown as such were all its movements and features tersely and graphically described. This, I do not attempt to give in this paper, but only such matters and events as appear in my personal knowlege, together with such movements as it may be necessary for me to refer to and note to explain, elucidate and connect them with incidents in my personal experience.

If, in a paper of this kind, Ego should frequently appear, no apology is offered.

After the battle of Stone River, in January, 1863, Bragg retired, with his army, to the table land in Tennessee toward the foot hills of the Cumberland Mountains, and took position on a line including Manchester, Shelbyville and Tullahoma, and carefully fortified the salient points; among others, a formidable fort at Tullahoma was erected and named Fort Bragg, while Rosecrans held the plains in a line running east and west from Murfreesboro. The roads leading up to Bragg's line passed through four Gaps known as Liberty, Guy's, Hoover's and Bell Buckle Gaps. In the latter part of June Rosecrans began his move on Bragg's line. Gen. Thomas' 14th Army Corps took the road to Hoover's Gap, held by Hardee's Corps of Bragg's Army. In the movements to be noted my regiment, the 4th Kentucky, with the 10th Kentucky, 14th Ohio, 10th and 74th Indiana, composed the second brigade commanded by Col. John T. Croxton, in the 3d Division, under Gen. John M. Brannan, of the 14th Army Corps, commanded by Gen. George H. Thomas. My regiment had been mustered into the service at Camp Dick Robinson

in 1861 by Gen. Thomas,and he took a liking to us and watched over us ever after with great care and interest. Any one of the regiment was always welcome about his headquarters, and at Chattanooga, during the terrible ordeal of the siege, he was ever mindful of the regiment, and after the river was opened and rations and clothing received, and the whole army felt better, the enlisted men of the regiment presented him with a $1,000 sword, with some pomp and ostentatious display, which he received kindly, gratefully and thankfully; and if I write feelingly and affectionately of him I am justified and make no apology. The 14th Corps took the road leading to Hoover's Gap, in front of which formed line of battle, threw forward skirmishers and prepared for action, and after a couple of days' maneuverng and some pretty hard fighting Hardee was driven out of and away from the Gap. He retreated on the road to Manchester and Tullahoma and for several days we followed him in almost a continuous skirmish. Wherever the ground offered a favorable place he would make a stand, and we would have to form line and drive him out. When night came we bivouacked then and there on the ground we had won that day. He was finally driven to his stronghold at Tullahoma which had been fortified by formidable earthworks, behind which Fort Bragg stood a tremendous bulwark, all of which was guarded by fallen trees, sharpened limbs and abatis of all descriptions. We had driven his skirmish line to within probably one-half mile of his outer works. Here the enemy made a tenacious and defiant stand against our line of skirmishers. Company A of my regiment being on the skirmish line, Company B was deployed and sent forward to reinforce the line, but the enemy still stubbornly held his ground. The rattle of the musketry fire and frequently the wounded coming back indicated quite a fierce struggle. The regiment stood in line of battle a few rods in the rear. The Brigade commander galloped up to my front, called me by name and gave me the order, "deploy your company, go forward and

pass through our skirmish line and assail those fellows in the woods, drive them into their works and assault the works and take them."

This order was plain and imperative and admitted no doubtful construction.

I turned to my company, commanded, "Attention company, forward, deploy as skirmishers, quick step, march!" and we were off.

The Major of my regiment was in command of the skirmish line where the battle was in progress. When he saw my line advancing he galloped up to me and asked my orders; when I told him he was silent for a moment, settled back in his saddle and remarked that he thought I had a serious job before me. I replied that might be the case, but I was going into those works or be brought out on a stretcher. As I passed through the skirmish line they ceased firing and gave my line a rousing cheer and made all kinds of complimentary and encouraging remarks. This was one of those situations that I thought it doubtful that I would get out of alive, for, if the enemy held to his position, under my orders I could not stop and did not intend to. As we moved forward the enemy, hearing the cheers and seeing my line boldly coming through the woods, gave us a parting shot and began to give way, and we drove them into their works and out, and as we moved through the fallen trees and sharpened limbs, the sun was shining intensely hot, and we suffered severely. But the enemy was fleeing and the tension relaxed. As I mounted the works I turned to look back, the line of battle had come through the woods into the open and the long line of bayonets glistening in the bright sun presented a scene of warlike splendor. I assembled my company near Fort Bragg, and in a few minutes Gen. J. B. Steadman, the grand old hero, rode up from another part of the field, now a General commanding a division. He had been Colonel of the 14th Ohio in our Brigade and knew me, and he called me by name and said, "I see you here;" and asked "did

you lead the advance into the works in your front." I told him "yes;" that I had taken the advance half a mile back and drove the skirmish line of the enemy into the works and out, when they moved off immediately in retreat, and he then ejaculated, "Quite an honor, sir, quite an honor, and you should have official recognition of it." The whole rebel army had taken flight and was gone, and we moved down to Elk River, stretched a cable over it, and held to that cable and waded over.

We went into camp, for a few days, near Gen. Thomas' headquarters, and a large part of the troops were camped along the river bottom. A crowd from many of the troops got together, one evening, took a band, and went to serenade him. We called him out and cheered him until he had to talk. He raised his hand and there was silence, and he said, "Soldiers, when I saw the gallant charges and assaults you made that drove the enemy out of Hoover's Gap, I felt proud of my Corps," and we cheered him till it echoed through all the woods in the river bottom. It was then a weary march, by University Place, and across the Cumberland mountains by way of Battle Creek to Bridgeport, Alabama, on the Tennessee River. Here we stopped, went to the woods and cut timber, made trestles and pontoons and bridged the river. When all was ready we started upon a perilous, indeed a perilous, campaign. To begin with, here was a great, treacherous river to cross, and before us were high, rugged, rocky, precipitous mountains upon which the clouds settled, with dark, gloomy valleys, glens and canyons everywhere, and a veteran army watching at the threshold.

Perilous? Bonaparte's crossing the Alps, about which so much has been written, was not so perilous. From the moment we crossed the river till we reached the battlefield of Chickamauga, it was a march of excessive toil and hardship. Climbing Sand Mountain, the roads were washed away, in places no road, and we had to make roads, double the teams to pull the wagons and artillery up the mountain while the troops assisted with their

shoulders to the wheels. We finally descended into Lookout Valley and camped near Trenton, where General Rosecrans had his headquarters. On the night of September 9, the message came up the valley, that Bragg had evacuated Chattanooga. Here was the supreme moment of this campaign, a problem to be solved of vast and unknown ills and consequences, if solved in the wrong way. It was up to General Rosecrans. His plan had been to move down behind Lookout Mountain and strike at Bragg's communications. Bragg saw that, and got out of Chattanooga, about the only move he made during the campaign that showed any knowledge of the principles of strategy. Two plans were open to Rosecrans. Thomas was at Trenton, and McCook, moving to Alpine, Ga., near the south end of Lookout Mountain. Rosecrans could recall McCook and direct him and Thomas to go down Lookout Valley, around the north end of the mountain and concentrate his whole army at Chattanooga, where he could have the situation well in hand, or could go on with his original plan over and around the mountain and intercept Bragg's retreat, as he supposed it to be. He chose to follow this plan and ordered McCook forward, and for Thomas to cross Lookout Mountain, through Stevens' Gap. We moved accordingly, and, in two full days crossing was a repetition of the toil over Sand Mountain. This proved to be an awful blunder of General Rosecrans. He failed to grasp the peril of the move, for while scattering his army, and giving the enemy the chance to atttack in detail, he knew he had not a soldier in sight that he could call to his aid. Hallock had put that out of his power, and he knew that every move that Hallock had ordered had failed, because he seemed to have no knowledge of the principles of strategy. Indeed, he showed no capacity for actual war, while in command on the battlefield, or in making plans when a thousand miles away. We had measured his capacity at Corinth in 1862. He had sent Burnside to East Tennessee with 20,000 men to protect the people there, oblivious of the fact that the only sure way to pro-

tect any one was to whip and destroy the rebel army wherever found. Hallock was a man of no ability in actual war, had treated Rosecrans in a supercilious manner, and was probably the most incompetent man ever put at the head of a great army of a great nation. Rosecrans knew all these things and should have exercised greater caution. He had done good service in West Virginia, for which McClellan had got the credit, and gave him command of the Army of the Potomac, and had done fairly well with the Army of the Cumberland. While trying to bring Bragg to battle in Tennessee had maneuvered him out of the State, but when trying to maneuver Bragg out of Chattanooga, it was a very different thing amid those stupendous mountains. The 14th Army Corps crossed the mountain, descended into McLamore's Cove, on the 18th and immediately came in contact with the pickets of the enemy, and soon learned that the whole rebel army was in our immediate front, and in a condition to attack us. As we stood in McLamore's Cove, McCook was five days' march from us, and beyond the mountain, and Crittenden was at Dalton, twenty miles from us the other way.

Probably, no army in history, ever had such an opportnity to destroy the opposing force, as Bragg had then and there on the 18th of September. Bragg saw his chance and ordered his Corps commanders to attack. They hesitated that day and that night we slipped away, and in a weary all night march we reached the road from Lafayette to Chattanooga at early dawn, when in a very little while was to open one of the greatest battles of history, for the savage tragedy was rapidly unfolding. If Bragg had attacked us in the Cove on the 18th with our backs against the great wall of the mountain, and confronted with an army of 60,000, for Buckner's Corps from East Tennessee, and reinforcements from the South had joined him, he might have crushed, might have annihilated, the 14th Corps, but when it was all over, there would have been many thousands, who started to join in the attack upon us, that would not have been

there to witness the final sacrifice, the final ruin of the Corps, for knowing the odds against us, and no possible help in sight, it would have been a battle of life and death, when in such a situation men fight with the desperation of despair. The weary march the night of the 18th brought us to the battlefield of Chickamauga. A few moments after we reached the road leading from the south to Chattanooga, where we halted a moment to get a cup of coffee, the bugle sounded attention. A report came that a brigade of the enemy had crossed the Chickamauga near Jay's Mill and was isolated from the rest of their troops, and our Division was sent down through the woods to capture it. My brigade was put forward to officiate at the capture. We formed line, threw out skirmishers, and moved to the attack, and in a little distance we met the skirmish line of the enemy, and drove it with their line of battle quite some distance through the woods, when instead of being an isolated Brigade we confronted two whole Divisions of infantry, with cavalry and artillery, and the battle opened in a violent struggle, and raged with savage fury all day and into the night. It was charge and countercharge, several times during the day we replenished our ammunition. Late in the afternoon we were relieved and moved some distance in a line to the right, formed line and the charge was ordered, and we moved through the woods like a raging storm, driving the enemy over their dead and wounded, and, at the foot of a large tree that I passed, I saw five lying dead or wounded. We drove everything before us and had come up almost to the muzzles of the guns in their battery when two bullet wounds put me out of business. Our line quietly fell back, night came soon after, but the firing still continued at different places along the line. All the long night Rosecrans was making superhuman efforts to right his lines for the morrow, for our army had been so scattered, and so worn out with marching day and night, that we were not half prepared to fight on the 19th and fought at great disadvantage. Our position was faulty, but the enemy

pressed us hard and it was the best we could do. The morning of the 20th came and Bragg attacked with savage fury. The 14th Corps held the extreme left of our line and covered the road to Rossville and Chattanooga, the road that Bragg was eager to gain and all his efforts were made on our line to get possession of that road. While all the early morning the right of our line was comparatively quiet, at nearly 11 o'clock an awful blunder was made in our line that brought untold ills and misfortunes upon us. The Divisions of Wood, Brannan and Reynolds were in line from right to left. It was reported to Rosecrans that there was a gap between Wood and Reynolds, and Wood, was ordered to close up on Reynolds. He moved and left open gap there. General Wood was an old army officer and knew full well that Brannan was between him and Reynolds, and ought to have known that there was some mistake about the order, but, without due consideration, he started to obey it and left a gap there in the line.

A Division is quite a factor in an army and the Commanding General of it should always be on the alert, and use some judgment in obeying orders. While this change was being made the enemy, who had been preparing to assault that part of the line, moved and found no enemy in the gap. He rushed through and cut off the whole right wing of our army. The Divisions of Sheridan and Davis of McCook's Corps were isolated and unfortunately, Rosecrans, McCook and Crittenden were in that part of the field, and being entirely cut off from the left of our line, passed through McFarland's gap and went on to Chattanooga, and were on the field no more that day. General Thomas, hard pressed all morning, had been calling for help, and knowing nothing of the awful calamity that had happened to the right wing of the army, was expecting reinforcements every moment, when to his amazement he saw the enemy swarming over the hills and woods and fields where he expected help. The imagination cannot bring one to realize what a dreadful shock it must

have been to him, and what his feelings were, when, some time in the afternoon, the awful news came to him that the Commanding General, and the whole right wing of the army, had gone from the field.

In this connection it can be truly said that the "Rock of Chickamauga" stood alone upon the field, whence all but him had fled, while the violent flames of battle flashed in a tempest of pitiless fury about him. The crisis had come and it called for a General of sound judgment, iron will and undaunted courage, with gallant and veteran soldiers, to meet it. Fortunately, the man and the boys were there. The situation was now desperate, with what remained of the army, beyond words to tell. General Brannan gathered up what was left of my regiment, the 4th Kentucky, and the rest of the brigade, and of his Division that he could collect, and took the position on Horse Shoe Ridge, a spur of Missionary Ridge; and General Thomas, with all he could collect of his Corps, and the stragglers to be found, took position on Brannan's left, the whole force probably 25,000 strong, and resolved to hold the ground or die. There then commenced a battle scene that probably has no parallel in history. The whole rebel army, 60,000 strong, flushed with the success over the right wing of our forces, now confidently assailed the position of Thomas and Brannan on Horse Shoe Ridge. They came in great, destructive waves, one after another, charge after charge, assault after assault, in continuous lines all that dreadful afternoon. But Thomas and his gallant band, in contempt of danger and death, stood firm to do or die in defense of their position, repulsed every assault made upon them, and when ammunition was exhausted they used the bayonet.

Late in the afternoon General Longstreet appeared upon the field with the flower of the army of Northern Virginia, in whose vocabulary—no such word as "fail" was admitted. He formed his line of battle of eight Brigades, of the troops with which he had swept the Peach Orchard and the "Devils Den" and assaulted

the rocky face of Little Round Top, at Gettysburg, and moved to the attack in this grand effort, with no thought of failure. It seemed at this time that Brannan would certainly be overwhelmed by superior numbers. But at this opportune moment, Gen. J. B. Steadman came upon the field with two brigades of the Reserve Corps, and two extra regiments, and impetuously assailed Longstreet's line and drove it from the field in one gallant charge. There was then a lull in their assaults, when Thomas and Brannan, and their gallant band, stood proudly victorious and defiant in their position. I challenge history to point to the page that shows a more resolute and successful defense made by any army. At that moment Sheridan and Davis were at Rossville, less than 3 miles away, with their Divisions and stragglers collected to near 10,000 men. If Rosecrans had been there, and brought this force upon the field to follow Steadman, in all reasonable probability, they would have driven the rebel army from the field and gained a glorious victory. That night General Thomas, quietly withdrew, not driven, to Rossville and next day to Chattanooga.

That heroic stand that afternoon on Horse Shoe Ridge was the safety and salvation of the country. Suppose the Army of the Cumberland had been beaten, annihilated then and there, the mind is dwarfed in trying to measure the countless ills and misfortunes that would have followed. The whole country from there to the Alleghany mountains would have been defenseless against the rebel army, and the rest is left to the imagination. Vast responsibilities rested upon General Thomas and the Army of the Cumberland, and they stood equal to the occasion and saved all. The Government never appreciated this gallant defense, Thomas should have been made a full General and no questions asked, and his officers with all others should have long since received substantial recognition for their gallant services, but many, very many, have passed away in want while those who still survive are, to-day, living witnesses of the base ingrati-

tude of a Government they saved by their valor from dissolution and ruin. If the reputation of the Army of the Cumberland was ever in the least clouded it was not its fault; when ably led and managed it was equal to any occasion, any emergency,and its fame is secure while the everlasting stars shine upon Missionary Ridge and the battlefield of Chickamauga.. But its work was not yet done, the vicissitudes of the siege of Chattanooga came, it faced starvation, but stood its ground. Bragg and his chief were not strategists of sufficient foresight to see the point, to guard so as to starve the army into surrender. Thomas had to have the road from Kelley's to Brown's Ferries on the river. If Bragg had put most of his army on Raccoon mountain, and at Wauhatchie and prevented the opening of that road, as he might have done, a different story might have been told. When Thomas got the river road open from Bridgeport, Alabama, to Chattanooga the army was safe, and, in the galaxy of the great, his name shines with the brightest luster. He was a man of exquisite refinement, sincere, modest, and devoted to duty and every inch a soldier. His Government, which he battled for so gallantly and successfully, failed to do him justice. It can't injure him in history. If some great cataclysm should deluge his country, and it should fall to pieces, and disappear from the map of the world; should some convulsion in nature cause the waters of the Tennessee River to run dry, and the frowning brow of Lookout Mountain to fly away in a cloud, the fame of Major General George H. Thomas, like that of the great Caesar, would still shine in history. The morning of November 25, 1863, came, the Army of the Cumberland stood before Missionary Ridge, eleven brigades, two miles long in line of battle, grand, magnificent, sublime, an avenging Nemesis. The bright sun was reflected from the bayonets of the foe who crowded the summit. Sherman was battling on the left. Grant, looking on, said that forces on top of the ridge were sent to oppose him, and then he ordered Thomas to move his army to a certain point.

General Boynton, years after, with all the records before him, in an address before the Society of the Army of the Cumberland, says that not a single command had left the hill in our front to oppose Sherman. Hence Bragg's whole army on the summit stood ready to oppose us with him in person. The Army of the Cumberland reached the point designated in the order to advance, it was not an inviting place to linger, the line was restless, it began to move, why or how or by what impulse is no concern of this paper. It moved forward and was climbing the mountain over rocks, gulches, trees, and all kinds of impediments and reached the top, grappled with the enemy, drove him from his stronghold, captured prisoners and cannon, and turned them upon the fleeing foe and stood proudly triumphant and victorious on the top of Missionary Ridge.

This grand charge and assault of the army of the Cumberland on Missionary Ridge at that time was the grandest achievement of any army or troops on either side during the war.

And again I challenge history to point to the page where any troops ever made such a gallant and successful charge under such difficulties. Pickett's charge at Gettysburg was brave, spectacular and gallant, admitted; but it was a flat failure and accomplished nothing but its own destruction. The storming and capture of Missionary Ridge by the army of the Cumberland broke the power of the rebellion in the middle Southwest, Chattanooga was safe, and the Atlanta campaign, and the march to the sea, were on.