

Excerpt From
"Personal Reminiscences of the Civil War"

By John Johnston

Pages 143-157

...few shells were seen bursting high in the air, leaving a white wreath of smoke. These soon grew thicker, and then came the sound of musketry, with terrific outpour. In a little while, the whole scene of conflict was covered with thick smoke and nothing could be seen. The roar of the battle continued without pause. Night came in a little while and wrapped all in darkness. When the night had fallen, my brothers and I, feeling anxious to learn some news from the front, rode down onto the pike and attempted to go closer in toward Franklin.

Just down the road a little way, we passed the headquarters, but we found the pike, which was closed in by a sort of ditch or hedge on each side, so crowded and packed with a writhing multitude of horsemen, stragglers, ambulances, wounded men, and others, that we found it impractical to go any further with safety to ourselves or others.

In going thus far, I had the misfortune of coming in collision with a horse ridden by a wounded soldier, in which my horse rubbed against the leg of the poor fellow, causing him much distress. This determined us to turn around and go back. Riding then back of the hills, we concluded we could do nothing better than to go in search of food and a camping place for ourselves and our horses.

After riding out southwestward for a mile or so, we came to a house where we stopped and asked for provisions. The house was literally overrun with stragglers who had been fed by the generous landlord. Hitching our horses out in the backyard, we camped for the night, after getting something to eat.

Here, although three or four miles away, we could distinctly hear the roar of musketry at Franklin, which kept up with unceasing fury until far into the night. Indeed, I think that the battle had not ceased when I fell asleep.

The morning of the first of December, 1864, arose bright and crisp and, mounting our horses early, my brother and I rode back toward Franklin. All was calm and noiseless as a Sabbath morning. Reaching the immediate field of battle just in the suburbs of the little town, we saw the awful results of the battle. On both sides of the turnpike, the ground was literally strewn with the dead. The ground here was perfectly level and bare of any sort of obstructions.

Just in front, stretched the earthworks of the enemy, fully four or five feet high and fronted by a ditch several feet deep. Just to the right, a horse had fallen with his

foreparts pushed up against the embankment. I think someone said it was where Gen. or Col. Adams had been killed.

In front of the breastworks to the left of the pike, there stood a few locust or Osage orange trees, which were skinned from bottom to top by bullets, the small branches and twigs being cut into ribbons.

Before such a withering fire delivered by more than 20,000 trained soldiers, smugly hid behind these formidable entrenchments, had our poor men marched for more than a mile through an open field. Oh, what inconceivable folly! How exasperating! How irretrievable!

It is said that Gen. Forrest, who had pushed across the Harpeth River and who menacing the flank and the rear of the Federal Army, had advised Gen. Hood of the strong position held by the enemy and had urged him in vain not to attack there but so move around on their flank and force them outing attack them in the open field. It is also pretty certain that, had they been let alone, they would have retreated to Nashville that night and that they had already prepared to do so. They did not retreat that night after the close of the battle, but after putting our array in such a condition that it was unable to follow.

Dismounting and walking over and about inside of the entrenchment, we could scarcely find a trace of any loss on the part of the Federals -- a few graves, that was all.

We went into the town, stopped at a hotel near the center of the town and got breakfast while some young ladies chatted away telling their experiences during the battle. Learning that Maj. John Ingram had been wounded and that he was out in a hospital south of town, we rode back down the pike and found him in an upper room of a house near the road. He had only received a flesh wound in the back of the shoulder and was sitting up in the bed, laughing and joking with Gen. John C. Brown and others who were also there among the wounded.

After passing a few words with him we bade him good-bye and rode back toward the town. Several hundred yards out from the Federal entrenchments, we saw fragments of our infantry lining up in pitiful looking little companies preparing to march out toward Nashville.

They had fought one of the most desperate battles on record. They had marched up to the very entrenchments and into the ditch and had stayed there fighting the enemy over the embankment. Perhaps more than 2000 of their comrades lay dead on the field, while about 3000 more had been wounded or captured.

There could not have been more than 20,000 effective men left in our infantry, and all of these were badly clothed. Yet this little band of ragged, barefooted heroes were now marching on to Nashville, headed by about 1700 or 2700 cavalry, to try the issues of war with at least 50,000 Federal soldiers, splendidly equipped and warmly clothed, and beautifully fed and safely resting behind formidable entrenchments!! This reads like fiction; but they are true, simple facts.

But, then, it must be remembered that I am writing nearly forty years after the events I am speaking of and was then only a private soldier and ignorant of some of the hopeless conditions under which we then struggled and was buoyant and hopeful and did not entertain a doubt of our final success.

It must have been nearly, if not quite, noon when my brother and I rode from Franklin and took the road toward Nashville, whither our command had gone early in the morning. We were joined on the road somewhere by Maj. E. S. Hammond, the Adjutant of our regiment, and we rode along together, conversing pleasantly, until near night we stopped at a house on the right of the road and asked for supper.

We were elegantly entertained by some very refined ladies who sat with us at the table, which was also well filled with other hungry soldiers who, like ourselves, had for one cause or another, gotten behind. After supper, we mounted our horses and resumed our ride toward Nashville, being anxious, if possible, to overtake our regiment that night. But after traveling for some hours after dark without reaching our regiment or finding a place to lodge, we rode up into the premises of Col. John Overton (Overton was at that time regarded as the wealthiest man in Tennessee and was father of John Overton of Memphis. He was known all over the State.) and stopped at the end of his back porch and hitched our horses to the trees in his backyard.

Maj. Hammond, who had some acquaintance with the old gentleman, went in and found entertainment for the night inside; but this we neither sought nor desired.

The old man came out at the end of the porch or gallery where we sat and talked with us for a little while in a very kindly tone. Pointing to some fires that were blazing on the hills to the northeastward and apparently not far away, he said, "Those are the campfires of the Yankees."

I have a sort of impression that my brother and I piled our saddles and luggage on Mr. Overton's back gallery and spent the night there. My next recollection is that, early next morning-- a cold, frosty December morning -- we rode out through his front gate, and we found our regiment in camp, probably not far off, in a flat place to the left of the pike behind a ridge which hid us from the view of the enemy, whose breastworks could be seen from the top of the ridge.

Late that afternoon and night, the Yankees fired a number of shells at random, which sailed far over our heads and did us no harm.

The next day, we were marched afoot over the hill and through the open fields, which sloped downward on the other side and moved perhaps four or five hundred yards toward the Yankee entrenchments, which we could plainly see running along the crest of the hills about one mile away.

As we came into their view, they began to throw some shells at us from their guns, some of which exploded very near us but, as we laid down close to the ground, I think no one was injured. I remember that some fragments of an exploded shell fell close to some men near the left of our regiment and close to the head of the 7th, who were so startled that they sprang to their feet.

"Lie down there," sternly commanded Col. W. H. Taylor of the 7th, and they immediately dropped to the ground again amid the laughter of their companies.

Several days were now spent by us in maneuvering, changing from place to place and watching the enemy's lines. Our part of the cavalry, under Gen. Rucker, gradually shifting further to the left and finally settling down on the extreme left of our army.

Late one afternoon, I was posted at the top of a hill in full view of the enemy's breastworks, which could be seen by me, circling the hills about a mile away. Our regiment had retired a short distance behind the hill, and I was left alone as sentinel to watch for any movement the enemy might make.

It was a cold winter evening. The soft ground was slightly crusted with the remnant of a recent fall of snow and sleet. As I sat thus on my horse, the mischievous Yankees -- doubtless thinking me a fine mark for their practice -- trained their guns on me and, for thirty minutes or more, threw shell after shell at me. They fired very deliberately about every half minute. I would see a puff of smoke, and then, in a second or two, I could hear a shell coming with a peculiar sort of rushing and humming and tremor-producing sounds -- so familiar to the ear of the soldier of that day. Shells thus thrown from a distance produced a sort of vibration in the atmosphere, which made it impossible for me to locate it or tell where it would strike.

The greater part of these, however, went either to one side or over my head or burst at some distance from me. As I had the whole hill to myself, I occasionally shifted my position some 50 or 100 yards to the right or left so as to force them to shift their game and make it more difficult, as I thought, to get my range.

My horse, who had never before been under fire, became much excited and, as the shells went rushing past, would shy around, give a loud whistling sort of a snort, which could be heard by my friends far in the rear and caused them some amusement. Night soon came on, and I was called in and moved away, thankful that I had escaped unhurt and entirely willing to retire from my exposed position.

We camped that night, I remember, on almost a bare hill in the woods lot of some of the rich residents of that neighborhood, with nothing but fence rails to make our fires. The night was cold and snowy, and I remember that, when our sergeant came around to detail men for the picket duty, I felt relieved that he passed me by, though I remember that Johnnie Alston was one of the number detailed and how sorry I felt from him as he went to stand on picket that cold night.

The next thing I remember is that we went into camp at the Cheatham place, just on the north side of the Charlotte Pike, and that we remained there for some days inactive and in comparative comfort, although soon after going into camp there, there came a heavy snow and on top of that a freeze which made the surface hard and slick. But we piled straw under our shanties and built fires in front and slept comfortably at night, despite the terrible cold. Our poor horses had to stand out in the open air, but we sheltered them the best we could with blankets and oilcloths, and they got along very well.

Seeing our mission was a hopeless failure, Wharton and I turned about to return to camp, and now came the worst part of our experience.

Night overtook us when we were still four or five miles from camp. It turned very cold, and a sweeping wind was blowing. Our horses' shoes were worn slick, and they slipped and slid over the frozen snow, which made our progress so slow and painful that we began to despair of getting back to camp that night, so sought a place to spend the night but were met with refusal everywhere. Finally, we came to the log cabin of an old ex-Confederate, he was prevailed upon to take us in on condition that we could not expect anything to eat for ourselves and little food for our horses.

We were glad to get something for our poor horses. After having secured which, we climbed up into a garret up next to the shingles, where the wind came through pretty freely, rolled ourselves in our overcoats and such other coverings as we could find, and spent a very uncomfortable night, having never gotten warm enough to be unconscious of a cold uncomfortable feeling while we slept. But all the same, we appreciated the poor fellow's hospitality. He gave us the best he had, which was more than anyone else had offered to do. I do not know whether we got any breakfast or not, but believe we did.

We moved out early, however, toward camp. We passed, I remember, through the premises of the Hardin place, passing between the cistern and the end of the mansion house, where everything was slick with ice. Whether anyone was at home or not, we did not know as we saw no one.

From there, we managed to reach camp somewhere about the middle of the day. I think, however, the weather had moderated some, and we did not suffer a great deal that morning. It is needless to say we had no further inclination to go out on errands.

We now had a few days of rest. Our line had now been established in front of Nashville, and we were waiting on the weather and the movements of the enemy. The situation was about this:

Gen. Hood, with his infantry and artillery amounting to about 20,000 men, occupied a line which stretched from about the Hillsboro Pike to beyond the Nolensville Pike, a distance of about four or four and a half miles and covering a section of the main approach to Nashville from the south, his center being about the Franklin Pike.

A gap of about three miles, extending from the left of our infantry to the Cumberland River, was occupied by Rucker's Brigade, which included our regiment and numbered about 1200 men under command of Gen. Chalmers.

A part of our cavalry, under Buford and Jackson, were on the extreme right of the army; and the rest of them were with Gen. Forrest out at Murfreesboro. We did not have more than enough men on the left to make a good picket line.

But just over the hill -- now out of sight-- were between 50,000 and 60,000 men piling up formidable fortifications and gathering provisions, arms, and munitions of war as if to defend themselves against an overwhelming force. It said that besides the greatly superior forces of infantry and artillery, they had 12,000 cavalry.

Gen Jordan of Beauregard's Staff, writing in reference to this situation at Nashville said, "The investing force (the Confederate Army at Nashville) on the other hand was absurdly small. Three small corps of infantry, the wreck that survived the shambles at Franklin, and the excessive exposure to the harsh December weather; and not exceeding 1700 cavalry or at most a force in hand of but 22,000 of all arms.

"We know of no parallel to this in war annals, no instance in which an army, so superior as that which Major Gen. Thomas commanded, permitted itself to be so long beleaguered by one so inferior in all but a supreme courage, a blanchless devotion to a cause, as was arrayed under the tattered Confederate crosses upon the ice clad hills that encircled Nashville."

Gen. Geo. H. Thomas was in command of the Federal Army at Nashville. A federal soldier, who was a great admirer of Gen. Thomas and with him during this time, represents him as laboring under great "anxiety and distress of mind" and as laboring day and night with unabated energy in making preparation to destroy Hood's army.

They have erected monuments to his memory since then, in honor of his wonderful achievements at Nashville and other places. Some of the things written about the achievements and heroism of the Federal Armies seem very absurd when tested by the actual facts.

But, while we were resting at the Cheatham Place, we little thought -- or cared-- what was going on in Gen. Thomas' mind and were largely ignorant of the gravity of the situation. We had an abundance of food and were engaged mostly, for the time, in eating and trying to keep warm. We knew that our infantry were in line somewhere over to our right, but never ventured to go over and see them.

We had a visit one day from Johnson Penn, one of our old Denmark friends, who came over to call on us. It was the last time we ever saw him. He was killed at Sugar Creek, the last battle which we had with the Yankees on our retreat to the Tennessee River.

About the 12th of December, the weather had moderated and the snow began to melt under the warm sun that shone for a few days from an unclouded sky.

On the morning of the 15th of December, just as we were finishing a bountiful breakfast from a large camp kettle, which still contained a goodly remnant of beef roast, done to a rich brown, we were aroused by the boom of a cannon over eastward and a call to arms.

Saddling our horses hurriedly, we mounted and rode rapidly up and over the hill toward Nashville. The sun was just up and the day was cloudless and balmy, though the ground was still covered with patches of the rapidly melting snow.

Riding a little way across the fields, we were dismounted and placed in line behind a stack of rails, which ran along the edge of a sort of ridge or bluff overlooking a small stream. Our line was very thin.

We had scarcely taken position before our rail stacks when we were warmly engaged with the enemy's skirmish line, which had pressed down toward our front. Now and then some shots would come tearing through the joints of our rails, which made us feel that we were not protected.

Ed Dickerson of Somerville was kneeling just to my right shooting over the top of our rails. Suddenly a bullet struck him full in the breast with a loud whack. The

poor fellow turned deadly pale and looked dreadfully serious, but, tearing open his shirt bosom, I saw a large pink impression on his breast where the bullet had struck him and had not entered.

"It's a spent ball, Ed," I exclaimed, "You are all right!" The expression of his face was changed as if by magic from that of anxiety to one of great relief and gratitude.

Spent balls made more noise and were said to give more immediate pain than those in full force. Ed was a noble fellow, and I was very happy to know that he was not fatally wounded.

After some time spent in this preliminary skirmishing, there came a sort of quiet, when someone called out, "Just look at the Yankees coming over the hill." Sure enough, as we looked over at the long, sloping hill, about a quarter of a mile in our front, there appeared line after line of men in blue, marching over the crest of the hill and down into the open flat field in our front. We stood and looked on with a feeling of helplessness. The hill and field were black with them. There was in our front an entire division of Federal infantry.

They marched straight across our front -- that is, the foremost line did-- and seemed for the time to ignore us and to direct their attack upon the line on our right. As we stood looking on while their front line was passing across our front, an officer, a colonel or brigadier general perhaps, was riding about thirty or forty feet in front of the line, holding his sword aloft in his hand, while his men marched behind him as if on parade.

"Shoot at that fellow," said some of our men. "Let me try him," said one of them, who rested his gun across a rail and took deliberate aim and fired. Immediately, at the crack of his gun, the valiant officer whirled about and rode rapidly back toward his line. We could not tell whether he was hit or not, but supposed that he must have either been struck or frightened by the shot.

Seeing the great masses of the enemy coming our way, we quietly mounted our horses and moved back across the field in our rear. I do not now remember that there was any field officer present or that we had any orders. There was no panic nor disorder nor haste in our movement. It seemed to be the unanimous sense of the "meeting" that such as movement was an absolute necessity and the best thing to do.

When we had gone about three or four hundred yards to the fence enclosing the field in which we were riding, we met McDonald's battalion (or Forrest's old regiment) coming our way led by Captain Barbour. Where they came from, I do not know. I think they had been posted way over on our extreme left, next to the Cumberland River. When the heads of our columns met, we stopped a few minutes

and then McDonald's battalion filed about and moved to the rearward, followed by us.

We did not understand the situation then, but the facts were that a corps of infantry and from 9000 to 12,000 cavalry, under Wilson, had driven through and over the infantry just a little way to our right and that the cavalry had gone down the Hardin Pike and had run Gen. Chalmers out of his headquarters on that pike, and that we had been, for the time, separated from our main army and that this immense force of infantry and cavalry was already overlapping and driving the left of our infantry line, and that a desperate battle was going on all along our front.

I cannot tell what route we took, but remember that, after riding in a roundabout way for some distance, we came in front of the Yankee cavalry near the site of Gen. Chalmers' headquarters on the Charlotte Pike--which we passed on our way and which we learned had been captured though we saw no Yankees there, they having probably turned about and retraced their steps or gone in another direction. At any rate, as near as I can remember, after moving about until we got across Charlotte Pike at a small stream or ravine, with a high and rather precipitous hill on our left, Gen. Chalmers galloped up on the right of our line and ordered us to advance over the hill and charge the enemy, who were over on the other side. This we did, moving forward in a gallop to the top of the hill and then facing to the left moved down a long slope.

We met a line of mounted cavalry whom we drove back down the hill. They advanced and retreated a number of times as we retired before them or attacked them. They greatly outnumbered us, but we put on a bold front and dallied with them and held them in check for some time. Finally, they formed in heavy lines far down the hill and gradually pressed us back over the hill.

Our line fell back slowly over the hill and, crossing a small creek at the bottom, took position on the farther bank, protected largely by a high ridge on our right. As our main body passed behind the crest of the hill, I, and probably some others, were left near the top as skirmishers and vedettes to watch the movements of the enemy. I could see them three or four hundred yards down the hill, advancing slowly through the hedge and small trees of the field and firing at us their long-range guns as they came on.

In a few minutes, a ball, which came with a loud catawailing sound, struck my old horse somewhere about the face with a loud noise, as if someone had slapped him with a thin board. I turned about and rode down toward our regiment, while the blood was gushing in great streams from my horse's nostrils. Seeing he was fatally wounded, I dismounted and stripped off my saddle and bridle; and he went on staggering down the hill and doubtless he bled to death in a short time, though I never saw him again.

Just as I had dismounted, one of our men--I think it was Matt Hardie of Medon--rode up leading a small sorrel horse that he had captured with saddle and bridle on him and tendered him to me. I was mounted again almost immediately and taking my own saddle in front, rode on with the regiment to its new position behind the creek just mentioned.

Riding some fifty feet to the rear of our line, I stripped my little horse of the fine McClellan tree saddle and put my own on him. While I was doing this, a large force of Yankee Cavalry mounted were coming down on the hill over against our line to attack us.

At the same time, the Federal gunboats in the Cumberland River, about a mile away, were throwing over at us, though they couldn't see us, very large bombshells, which burst with a sound that seemed to make the air and earth quiver. One exploded not far from us while I was arranging my saddle, which made about the most awful noise that I heard during the war.

Leaving my horse in charge of someone in the rear, I went forward and climbed the ridge in our front, just in time to see a large line of Federal Cavalry, who had advanced to within probably one hundred yards, driven back by the hot fire they met from our men and by our artillery.

It was a misty, dark evening, and night came on soon, greatly to our relief. We had been actively engaged since early morning. I cannot tell our loss that day. It has gone from my mind, but all my personal friends were safe, so far as I now remember.

How short the day seemed, and how soon the night came! We had battled from early morning and were now holding at bay an overwhelming force of Yankee Cavalry. Why they had not enveloped us in their enormous folds and captured us all before night I cannot tell, but they didn't. But we were now in a perilous position though we, the private soldiers, did not know the state of things then. Gen. Hood's army had been driven back several miles from its advanced position in the morning and was now at bay, almost enveloped with immensely superior forces of the enemy. Large masses of the Federals, pressing his left flank, were pushed between us and them; and we must now take a night march in a circuitous way to get in their front again and to be in touch with our own men.

So, after dark under the leadership of the gallant Col. Kelly, our small brigade, with the exception of the 7th Tennessee which had in some way become detached from us and had gone toward Franklin, (so Col. W. H. Taylor told me long after the war) moved out quietly toward our right. How far we travelled, I do not know, but we went on by crossroads until late in the night.

Our regiment was in front, and I remember that we came to a halt in front of a small house on our right and Col. Kelly sent in and had the owner aroused and brought out to guide us. This he did with apparent cheerfulness. It was then about midnight. With our guide at our head, we rode on until we came to the Hillsboro Pike.

A slight snow was falling as we rode along. We kept very quiet and talked in undertones, though we were cheerful and hopeful.

When we reached the Hillsboro Pike, we turned to the left and marched slowly in the direction of Nashville. After going a short distance, we saw a small firelight flickering in the road just ahead, and presently we were greeted with the report of a musket and the whistle of bullets passing over us. We had come upon the Federal pickets. Coming now to a stop, Col. Kelly quietly turned about and gave the order in low tone, to countermarch.

We then marched back down the pike for some distance, halted, threw out a skirmish line across to the right and left of the pike while our main body retired to a hill in the rear and formed in line and threw up such barricades as they could make out of fence rails, logs, and brush, and awaited the coming of daylight.

I was down in front on the skirmish line one-fourth of a mile out. It was a soft, misty night, and dark. The enemy's skirmishers had followed us down the road and, coming within about fifty yards of us, exchanged a few shots with us in the dark. We could see nothing but the flash of their guns. They seemed to be satisfied with the knowledge of our presence and after firing a few shots, let us alone until morning.

Who my comrades were that stood with me on the skirmish line that night, I find it impossible to recall, but I know some of them were my personal friends. We sat our horses about thirty or fifty feet apart, waiting for the day.

I think the Yankees must have been very late and slow in starting out that morning, for we were not disturbed until late in the morning, as I now remember. It was a soft, drizzly morning, though later on the rain was mingled with snow. After awhile, the advance of the enemy began to make their appearance and we had a lively skirmish with them as they slowly pushed us back over the hills and through the open woods.

I remember that, at one point, I was standing in a sort of lane on the crest of a hill with a stone fence behind me and that, in order to open a way of retreat, I dismounted and with a great deal of labor and time, tore down enough of the fence for my horse to leap over, which I caused him to do when our line had to move back.

It was not until about three o'clock p.m. that they came on in such a decided way that we were forced to fall back on our main line.

Finally, about that hour, being closely pressed, we rode down across a sort of valley. I, passing through a woods lot in front of a farm house and out a gate on the farther side, joined my comrades as they and we ascended the opposite hill, marching to the sound of bursting shells and the crackle of small arms, while the air was filled with flakes of snow.

Reaching our main line at the top of the hill, we saw the 7th Alabama marching up afoot from the right front, and preparations were being made to mount and move to another point. We had baffled and detained that overwhelming force in our front at this point, until this late hour of the day, but things had gone badly far over to the right.

We did not know then what had happened, but Hood's Army, after making a gallant but hopeless struggle from early morning, had just at this hour been outflanked and driven from the field and was now endeavoring to make its retreat to and down the Franklin Pike, while a division of Federal Cavalry were now swooping down the Granny White Pike (which several miles lower down ran into the Franklin) for the purpose of cutting off their line of retreat or at least of striking them in the flank as they passed down the Franklin Pike, and Gen. Hood, in full realization of the desperateness of the situation, had sent a dispatch to Gen. Chalmers saying, "For God's sake, drive the Yankee Cavalry from our left and rear or all is lost." And we now mounted in haste and went galloping by a crossroad over toward the Granny White Pike to throw ourselves in the path of the ten thousand cavalry, which were then going rapidly down it under Gen. Hatch.

The evening was dark and lowering, and it was raining slightly as we rode rapidly across the soft country road toward the Granny White Pike, which was only two or three miles away. It was growing dark when we reached the Granny White Pike. Turning to the left, we rode along the pike northward a little distance and halted in a lane with a field to our right and small field on our left, enclosed by a common rail fence.

About one hundred yards in our front, the road seemed to pass through a range of hills, which I could see looming up through the mist and dark to the right of the road.

Some part of our cavalry which had gone ahead of us -- which I believe was Col. Kelly's Regiment-- and probably some others, had been placed in position squarely across the pike.

We had scarcely come to a stop when a few bullets came whistling down our line from the front. We were immediately faced to the left. A few men sprang to the ground and threw down some panels of the fence, which we rode through and hurriedly dismounted and marched afoot to the far side of the field and aligned ourselves behind the fence and at right angles to our men, who had formed across the road in our right. Others formed on our left and extended probably into the open woods beyond the south fence.

Here, we became immediately engaged. The enemy, in overwhelming numbers, was already close to our front and flank. Wilson's whole cavalry corps, estimated to have numbered from 9000 to 12,000 men, were now attacking our small force.

Hood's army had been driven from its last position and was now making its way to and down the Franklin Pike, the only avenue of retreat left. And this large cavalry force, including the force we had been fighting over on the Hillsboro Pike, which had doubtless followed us, was now endeavoring to push its way down the Granny White Pike in order to cut off the retreat of our army or to strike it on the flank of the Franklin Pike. Our small force of not over 1200 men, planted across the pike and to the westward of it, was the only obstacle in their way and the only protection left to Hood's army.

We, that is the privates, did not know of all this just then nor did we know of the fearful odds against which we fought, but we were in fine spirits and sprang to our work with alacrity and enthusiasm. Kneeling or crouching down behind that rail fence, which constituted our only protection, we poured a constant stream of shot into the night.

We could see nothing; the mist and darkness had covered all in front, and we shot blindly out into the darkened woods. Our whole line from right to left was one continuous blaze and roar of musketry. How long this continued, I don't know. I thought about 30 minutes, but the historians and military men, who have written of this affair, say -- some, about two hours; until near midnight; but I know that all came to an end very suddenly and unexpectedly.

While we were in the height of the engagement with no sign of wavering and no thought of end, Johnnie Alston, who was immediately at my right, suddenly sprang to his feet and exclaimed, "There they are now!!" indicating that he saw the enemy's line only a few feet away.

Instantly, as if by magic, our whole line rose to their feet and began to fall back. I jumped up and called out, "Oh, no--don't run, boys!" But it was too late. All were now in full retreat, and we could do nothing but make a run for our horses, which were being held at the other side of the field.

What John Alston saw I don't know; and whether anybody else saw the situation as he did I can't tell; but the breakup seemed to be by common consent, as the whole line apparently gave way all at once. And the sequel seems to have shown that we did not fall back any too soon, for the line of the enemy had almost enveloped our left and was almost in reach of the pike and our way of retreat in that direction would have been effectually closed.

As it was, quite a number of our men were captured before they could reach their horses. A number of my own regiment was so captured, including Dr. - - Turner, our assistant surgeon. I had not been able to see anyone in our front, but I could hear the Yankee officers giving commands, apparently very close at hand.

As soon as our line broke, we went on a run for our horses. The little field, which we were crossing, had been in cultivation. The ground had been recently frozen, but had thawed and was made very soft by the gentle rains; so, as we ran, we sank our ankles in the soft ridges and our feet became weighted and clogged with mud; but we had not far to go and the most of us reached our horses in safety.

Most of our horses' holders had stood faithfully at their post, handed us the reigns of our horses, and galloped away. My little sorrel was spirited and restless, and I found some difficulty in mounting him. Placing, with some difficulty, my muddy boot into the stirrup, just as I made a spring for the saddle, my horse made a little turn, my foot slipped out, and I came back to the ground. Everything was now in a state of confusion and stampede.

The enemy was close behind us and pouring shot after us. I remember that, before I had gotten on my horse, a wounded horse came running frantically past me close to my right and ran with fearful force against the fence, which threw him back on his haunches. Whether it was the horse of an enemy or of one of our own officers, who had been killed or captured, I never knew.

Succeeding in a second effort, in getting on my horse, I had scarcely gotten into the saddle when John Holden, one of the members of the Somerville company, came running up and said his horse was gone. I told him to get on the fence and get behind me, and I would take him off. With some difficulty, he got up on to a corner of the fence, and I, with equal difficulty, got my horse near enough for him to get on; but just as he made a spring for the horse's back, the animal shied off. He missed his landing and went to the ground, "Try it again, John," I said "We'll make it next time." He ran forward and scrambled up on another fence corner, and, as I rode up again, he succeeded in getting on behind me.

All of this, as may be readily conjectured, consumed a minute or two of very precious time and, by the time I had gotten Holden mounted behind me, our whole regiment had disappeared from the field. Getting into the road, we followed it

about 200 yards, when we saw over about 50 yards to the right a group of horsemen, seemingly crowded around some object and evidently ending up some sort of scrimmage.

I heard them raise a sort of shout or hurrah as we passed near them. We could see them but dimly and could not tell who they were, and I thought at first that they were our own men, but concluded to ride past them. It was well that I did so, for it turned out that it was a group of Federal soldiers, who had just captured Gen. Rucker, after a brief but desperate fight in which he was severely wounded and thrown from his horse. His arm was amputated by Federal surgeons that night or the next day.

After passing some little distance beyond the scene of Gen. Rucker's capture, I overtook one of the subordinate officers of our regiment whom I recognized -- but have forgotten who it was—and we rode on together until we came to a road that branched off toward our left and, at his suggestion, we turned off the main pike and followed this road, which led in a somewhat southeasterly direction.

I have, also a sort of dim recollection that, about the time we turned into this crossroad, we overtook some other soldiers leading a horse he had picked up on the way and that John Holden eagerly and gladly jumped down from behind me and mounted this loose horse.

All behind us and about us was now perfectly quiet so far as we could hear or see, and we travelled on down this little crossroad undisturbed by pursuit or sound of battle.

Historians, who have attempted to give an account of this affair, have stated in their books that, after the stampede on the Granny White Pike of which I have just told, the 7th Alabama made an attack on the Federal troops while they were crowding about Gen. Rucker and, by a sudden volley, had driven them from the field and thereby checked all further pursuit by the enemy down the Granny White Pike.

This is certainly very inaccurate. I am sure that there were none of our troops behind me when I left the field, and I rode straight down the Granny White Pike for several hundred yards after passing the scene of Gen. Rucker's capture and that there was not a Confederate to be seen on the pike, except the one or two whom I overtook between the battlefield and the point of intersection of the pike with the little crossroad into which my companions and I turned, and I am sure that there was no firing heard nor any sound of battle after we turned off the public road.

The fact is, it seems to have been definitely ascertained, the enemy made no further aggressive movement that night but, after the capture of Gen. Rucker and the close

of the fight on the Granny White Pike, drew off and went into camp, caused, it is said, by the report that had been circulated by Gen. Rucker and others that Gen. Forrest had reached us with reinforcements and was then in command of our cavalry.

Another thing I wish to say -- Gen. Rucker has been put forth and described as the heroic figured in this affair. It is true that he was the General in Command, and I would not detract anything from any glory or honor to which he is entitled, but the fact is that, to us, Col. D. C. Kelley was the real hero and the one whom we regarded as nearest us.

He had led us in the night march from the Hardin to the Hillsboro Pike, was at the head of our column when we reached the Granny White Pike on that dark December evening, and I well remember that he rode up and down behind our line that night as we were fighting, behind the fence in the little field, calling out to us as he rode by, "Pour it into them, boys-- pour it into them." And that a bullet clipped a piece out of the left shoulder of his gray coat that night. In fact, I may say confidentially it was believed among the soldiers that Gen. Rucker was drunk and that Kelley was practically in command of the brigade. Be these things as they may, the fact is that I and the two or three companions that were with me rode quietly and undisturbed down the road we had taken for two or three miles when we came squarely upon the Franklin Pike.

The grade of the pike here was slightly elevated above the level of our road. There was a sort of side lot and a house to our right and a fence to our left, and the pike itself was crowded with Hood's Infantry, which were marching down it, quietly, but apparently in a demoralized condition. They were talking quietly to each other.

I was greatly surprised when I came thus upon our retreating army. We had no correct information as to the happenings of the day or the result of the battles that had ben fought.

Just as we reached this point, the moon shone brightly between the broken clouds and shed a full soft light on the scene. My heart sank within me when I saw our routed army trudging down the muddy pike, and I felt then for the first time that our cause was lost.

After looking on for a few minutes, my companions and I turned about and rode back about 50 yards and concluded to rest for the night.

After procuring some forage from the premises nearby for our horses, we made some sort of a sleeping place in the corner of a fence, probably by putting rails together and laid down and slept until morning. I remember that I and my horse camped under a little white oak tree, which stood near the fence. I think I did not tie my

horse to the tree, but, slipping the bit from his mouth, wrapped the reins or halter around my hand and laid down to sleep in that way, so I could escape more readily in case of the approach of the enemy.

We had been almost continuously in the saddle since the early morning of the day before and had had no thought of sleep or rest or even of food, and were now lying down quietly to sleep within a short distance of a whole corps of Yankee cavalry and thousands of Yankee infantry, who were camping to the north and east, while our defeated army was tramping down the pike in hopeless rout.

Again, the historians who have written up the matter have depicted the weather as being awfully cold that night and the ground covered with snow and ice. On the contrary, it was a mild soft December night. It had been raining and snowing slightly during the previous day and night, but now the clouds had swept away and, at midnight, it was clear and bright and balmy. The first cold spell had passed, and the other had not yet come on, but it did come in a few days afterward.

When I awoke the next morning, the sun was just risen and the sky was cloudless. Hood's army had all passed and everything was perfectly quiet and peaceful. Not a shot was heard and there was not a Federal or Confederate soldier in sight, except a straggler or two from the infantry who had bivouacked in the open lot and were sitting by a little bit of a fire, which they had kindled.

If Gen. Thomas and Gen. Wilson were indeed so valiant and were pressing us with so much vigor as is represented by Federal writers, it would seem that they might at least have captured a few stragglers who occupied such an exposed position as late as seven o'clock that morning!!! The truth is that the Federal armies were handled with a great deal of timidity, and this fine writing about the greatness of their achievements is all bosh.

When we awoke that morning, my companions and I, whoever they were, realizing that we were in dangerous proximity to the enemy, mounted our horses, rode out into the pike, and followed it in a walk toward Franklin. We passed an occasional straggler sitting on the side of the road or hobbling along, whom we warned of their danger, telling them they would be captured unless they got along.