

**"FROM MURFREESBORO TO CHICKAMAUGA
----- AND LIBBY PRISON." -----**

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The twenty-first Michigan Infantry, in command of Colonel William B. McCreery, during the winter of 1862-3, were stationed at Murfreesboro, Tenn., employed on picket duty and guarding forage trains, until June 24th., 1863, when it advanced with the army under General Rosecrans on Tullahoma and Chattanooga. The brigade was under command of General Lytle, to which brigade the twenty-first was attached. We soon encountered the outposts of the Confederate army, and skirmishing commenced in earnest; and I shall never forget the dismal cry of a mortally wounded confederate on that day. His voice grew fainter and fainter until, exhausted from loss of blood, he ceased to moan, and his spirit joined the hosts of those gone before. Our regiment was ordered to the right into a grove of timber to support a battery, and while viewing the soldiers I was greatly surprised at their seeming indifference to the situation. Some of the boys were picking geese and poultry of various kinds, some skinning mutton, and all seemed unmindful of the impending danger around them; shot and shells were occasionally sent flying through the timber and adjoining fields, and scarcely drew a passing remark from any of them. This being my first experience in battle or skirmish it made a lasting impression on me. But as time wore on, the incidents of army life caused all who participated in such scenes to become careless and indifferent to the dangers of battle and strife that constantly surrounded them. The day closed without any casualties to our regiment, and we soon had orders to move in double quick time to the left in direction of Hoover's Gap to support our comrades in battle, where we could distinctly hear the incessant rattle of musketry and an occasional cannon shot, but before reaching the battle ground the firing ceased, and we went into camp. The next morning we met the ambulances conveying the wounded back to Murfreesboro, and the thought passed through my mind how happy they must feel, (although some of them perchance might be mortally wounded), to think they would escape the coming conflict, for the present at least. We soon came to the battle ground of the day previous, and the sight of the dead confederates cast a gloom

of sadness over all, for the time being; but the knowledge of foes in front soon dispelled it. Soon after passing the battle ground our brigade was detailed to go on a raid up the mountain to our right in pursuit of the enemy. Delays in the march prevented our joining the main army, and night coming on we were obliged to go into camp without tents, blankets or rations, (so far as the officers were concerned), without dinner, without supper, and no prospect in view for breakfast - was a gloomy outlook for the time being. I took up my abode under the ambulance with my saddle for a pillow and poncho for a blanket. A heavy wind and rain during the night drove the mud from the ambulance wheels all over me. The situation, with cold and hunger, made me think of home and its surroundings with a good degree of confidence and anxiety. We were early on the march, and at ten A. M. we came down to a small village expecting to find our wagon train but were disappointed, as it had not arrived, and a gloomy outlook for rations awaited us. But the inventive genius of a hungry soldier is equal to any emergency, and I soon bribed the guard at the grist mill, and got a sack of corn meal, and one of our boys let the miller's fat hog out of the pen, and we soon had corn meal mush, fried pork, a barrel head for a plate, a paddle for a spoon, enjoying the best meal of my life.

We remained in camp during the day. On the following day we resumed our march and came to the village of Winchester, where the confederates had made a stand. Our brigade was brought into line of battle in full view of the town, and the confederate cavalry were awaiting our advance. On that memorable day was my first view of a cavalry charge, which, in a brief way I will attempt to describe: Our cavalry was drawn up in line in the valley midway between our lines and the confederates. When the bugle sounded the charge, a dash of the entire column started but some of them seemed to falter and fall to the rear, when the bugle would call a halt, and the column would reform and await the sound to charge, when the same programme would be enacted as at the first. And some three or four attempts were made with like results. On the next charge, one lone cavalryman rushed madly forward and put to flight the opposing enemy. And then the balance of the command rushed forward to his assistance and followed up the retreating foe, who made a stand in ambush on the opposite side of a small stream and fired a volley into our pursuing cavalry. The only casualty, however, was a wounded horse - leg broken below the knee. Our regiment was deployed to the right in a belt of timber that overlooked the opposite side of the stream and adjoining fields, when one of our soldiers espied, as he supposed, a confederate

cavalryman emerging from a house and fired on him; but the scream of a female voice and her rush to the spot and picking up a prostrate form and conveying it to the house, led us to think it was a child instead of a confederate soldier. And when we passed over the stream I visited the cottage and found a lad of some ten years prostrate in death - shot through the right breast - his mother and sister in the agony of grief and despair, no father or brother near to lend a helping hand. Sad indeed was the sight. After gathering up a small contribution for the bereaved family, we moved on and went into camp. On the night of July third at Cowan Station. On the morning of the fourth at day break we were startled from our slumbers by the rapid discharge of cannon in close proximity to our camp. I rushed out to ascertain the cause thinking we were attacked by the enemy, but soon learned it was a few patriotic soldiers celebrating the fourth. And by reason of myself being somewhat frightened at the first alarm I thought I would pass it along to my officer tent mate, (but will omit his name). Accordingly, I rushed back to the tent apparently in great alarm and shouted, "We are all taken prisoners, for goodness sake hurry and give me your pistol." He sprang out and put on his coat and grabbed his sword and belt and started for the tent door, when I called his attention to the condition of his feet and legs, no pants or boots on. He then rushed for his pants and got them on hind side before. The change made more delay, and the alarm outside increased; and in the hurry he got his boots on the wrong feet and made a break for the command. And by reason of his boots being on wrong he toed out so much that he caught his foot on a tent stake and fell. I asked him if he was wounded. Just then one of the corporals came along and the officer called out, "Why don't you call out the guard?" The corporal looked somewhat surprised and puzzled and inquired what the trouble was. The reply was: "Don't you know we are attacked by the rebels?" The corporal laughed and said they are celebrating the fourth. Then the officer turned on me, and I had to beat a hasty retreat and was obliged to go with the company mess for breakfast. We finally compromised by my promising to keep it a secret - said pledge I have faithfully adhered to.

During the day a Lieutenant of the cavalry brigade was brought into camp by one of his comrades, having been killed the day previous while driving the confederates up the mountain, and one of our boys was shot while asleep in his tent by the accidental discharge of a gun in an adjoining tent. During the remainder of July up to September we were stationed at Cowan, Anderson and Bridgeport. September 10th., our regiment crossed the Tennessee river on a

treslex bridge, and while the wagon train was crossing it went down, and army wagons, mules and drivers were floundering in the river and strange as it may appear, only one mule was drowned. I had remained on the camp ground to assist in sending the sick to the hospital, and had just saddled my horse to cross the river and had full view of the calamity; and had to remain on the old camp ground until the next day. As soon as the bridge was repaired I crossed and joined my regiment on the mountain. Nothing of any importance transpired during our journey over Sand and Raccoon mountains down to Alpine valley. There we were encircled by the confederates and had to beat a hasty retreat back up the mountain, while the fourth Michigan cavalry held them in check and prevented them from attacking us in the rear.

Soon after we gained the summit of the mountain we came to a primitive farm house surrounded by a high rail fence, and in the enclosure were some twenty or thirty pigs guarded by a detail of cavalrymen. The owner of said premises stood in the door viewing the union soldiers as they were marching past. A General of some one of our brigades rode up to the gate, saluted the man, and asked if he would sell him a couple of those pigs for his head-quarter mess. The genial host answered in the affirmative, the price and payment was soon adjusted and the General turned to some of his boys and said: "Boys, catch two of those pigs and bring them to my quarters when we get into camp." And every boy in hearing made a rush for the pen, and in less than twenty minutes all those pigs had deserted the confederacy and sought protection under the folds of the Star Spangled Banner, greatly to the amusement of the boys, and sorrow to the owner.

We continued our march up the mountain to Dowerty Gap and held it until the 17th. of September, marched all day and camped at the foot of the mountain. We had not been in camp over two hours when the bugle sounded, "Strike tents and fall in for an all night's march." Halted at day break, made coffee and resumed our march, alternately fighting Rebs. in our rear and pushing forward to the Chickamauga battle field. Arrived at Lee & Gordon's Mills at four P. M., September 19th, and camped for the night. Our head-quarter mess gathered around a large stump for a table, and while we were eating the confederates attempted to advance their picket line; and a sharp musket fire was distinctly heard as the two contending foes struggled for mastery of the situation. The union forces held their line and the firing ceased. Our Colonel remarked: "Boys, it will be our turn tomorrow, and the probabilities are that this will be the last time we will all have the privilege of eating supper together," the truth of which was fully verified on the following day,

Sunday, September 20th. Our Lieutenant Colonel was killed and Colonel severely wounded and taken prisoner, and two of the surgeons, myself being one of the number. I was early ordered to the hospital to assist in dressing the wounded brought in from the battle field during the day; worked until three A. M., at which time I received orders to get the ambulance train in readiness. Our division had moved to the left and drawn up in line of battle on the Chickamauga creek some distance below the mill and near Crawfish spring, at which place General Sheridan's brigade hospital was established. The darkness of the night was equal to the Egyptian darkness mentioned of old. I had no one to guide or direct me, and I fell in with the crowd of moving artillery, ambulance and soldiers, giving my horse the reins to guide and direct me, by reason of having tested his ability on previous occasions in finding the regiment at times when duty had called me away for a short time. Especially, on the night of September 18th., near midnight, I was away looking after the sick. When I returned to join the command; they had moved and I had no idea whatever of the way or road they had taken, and giving my horse his freedom, in less than an hour he passed several artillery trains and regiments, and halted in his speed only, when he was at the rear of the regiment. And the route lay through a timbered country with by and cross roads running in every direction; and on the present occasion I thought that my only alternative in the present emergency was to let him take his course, and it proved all right for we had not traveled over an hour when he came to a halt and I could not induce him to go any further. That halted the ambulance train and all in the rear, as it was a timbered country and so dark that passing was impossible. An officer soon rode up and inquired, "What ambulance train is this?" I replied: "A portion of Sheridan's 21st. Michigan." He said: "File them off into the woods and let the artillery pass, your regiment is opposite on the hill." As soon as I got the ambulance out of the road, I went in search of the regiment, and found them located as stated. And I came to the conclusion that the animal creation has one gift of the senses that man is not in possession of. At day break I received orders to take an ambulance and go back to the Division Hospital and get a larger supply of bandages, and take back to the hospital three soldiers wounded in the battle of the 19th. In returning, I was notified that the road on the ridge just ahead of me was in gun shot reach of the Confederate Cavalry, and that they were firing on every one that attempted to take that road to the battle field. Whether the report was true or false I was unable to tell. Just then a darkey emerged from a road just ahead of me and was making direct for the disputed ground on

horseback, and I awaited results. He had only got well started on the road when the firing commenced; and the frightened darkey made a lively run into the timber just in advance. The event gave me a knowledge of the situation, and I turned back some twenty rods and took a side road that led in the direction where our brigade was stationed, and it brought me out to the ground selected for hospital quarters in the coming conflict. Just then an orderly rode up and reported that the brigade had moved to the left, and I was ordered to go to the front and ascertain its location. The battle had already commenced, and when I found the brigade the rebel bullets were coming quite too freely for absolute safety. I continued up the line until I found our regiment and observed one of our boys standing on a log, loading and firing as deliberately as though he was practicing target shooting. And I subsequently found him dead when I got a permit to visit the field the second day after the battle, - shot through the right side in the region of the liver. He had been dead but a short time as he was yet warm. The wounded soon began to fall back, and I commenced caring for them as best I could with what few appliances I had in my haversack. Soon the war whoop of the confederates sounded for a charge, and General Sheridan came riding up and said: "Surgeon, get to the rear as soon as possible, for you are liable to be killed here any moment and we can't spare you at this critical time." And being a good soldier, ever ready to obey the command of my superior officer, I was not long in making a hasty retreat. On reaching the location selected for the hospital ground, I found it deserted and went into a depression just below the Widow Glenn's house and established a camp for dressing the wounded on my own responsibility. Soon Dr. Blaker came to my assistance.

While dressing a shell wound in the thigh of a comrade, he gave a convulsive shudder. I looked to ascertain the cause and discovered that a stray bullet had passed through his brain. As I left him, a small boy-like soldier stood near leaning on his gun, wounded in the neck, the ball had gone through coat and vest collar, and lodged in the muscles in the back of his neck. I removed the ball, handed it to him and dressed the wound. He viewed the missile a moment, reloaded his gun, rammed the ball I gave him down it and said he would go back into the fight and send the double dose of lead through some poor rebel with my compliments, by way of acknowledging its reception. Just then there was brought to me a soldier shot through the right lung. He was spitting blood in large mouthfuls and blood oozed out of the wounds, both in front and back, at each expiration of his breath. After strapping a compress over both orifices, I had him put into an

ambulance and taken to the hospital. Soon after the confederate cavalry came in sight and I ran into a swamp and made my way back towards the brigade hospital, near Crawfish Springs. It was near night, and our cavalry were in line near the springs; and the confederates on the elevation over the adjoining field. There were several vacant saddles and horse without a rider, and our boys gave me a pressing invitation to join them and make my way to the rear, saying: "You will soon be captured if you remain." I told them I could not think of leaving the wounded and would not, unless forced to do so by the confederates as a prisoner of war. On reaching the hospital, I found the young soldier who was shot through the right lung wrapped in his blanket on the ground still alive, but very feeble and faint. I made some coffee, and soaked some hardtack in it, fed and made him as comfortable as I could under the circumstances, and left him to care for others. Soon our cavalry fell back and the rebel cavalry made a bold dash and took us all prisoners, and commenced robbing the wounded of their haversacks and rations. One soldier had a half-dozen of them coming out of a tent before I was aware of what they were doing. I took the haversacks away from him and returned them to the boys, and drove them out of the tent and had no further depredations in that line. I continued dressing the wounded until near midnight, when my physical endurance gave out and I could go no further, having been in active duty three days and two nights until midnight of the third, without a moment's sleep or rest. On the morning of the 21st, the first soldier I visited was the shot through the lungs, expecting to find him dead. As I lifted the blanket from off his face he opened his eyes and feebly said: "Doctor, I am alive yet." I fed him coffee and hardtack, got a tent put up and moved him into it and dressed his wounds, and, strange as it may appear, he was walking around the camp in less than four days. But his right arm was paralyzed and remained in that condition at time of parole, and leaving the hospital. I don't remember his name, company, or regiment, and never heard of him since he left camp. After going the rounds of the hospital, I applied to the confederate officer for a pass to visit the battle ground, to look after the wounded that were left on the field after the battle of the day previous. And was refused with the excuse that he would have to see some one higher in command. I asked, "Will you see him and get it ready for tomorrow?" The next day came and no pass. I went into the tent and wrote one and presented it to him for signature. After considerable persuasion he signed it, and I started with what supplies I could carry for the battle field. I found three or four boys who were slightly wounded in attendance, carrying water and rendering them

all the assistance possible. And with their help I was able to dress the wounds of most of them. There was no conveyance to bring them in. I tried to hire a team from a countryman that came along, but could not induce him for money or humanity sake to lend any assistance. I had scarcely arrived on the field when a squad of confederate cavalry rode down and demanded my passport or authority for being there. I handed him my pass. After looking at it for a moment he handed it to his orderly, remarking that his eyes were sore and he could not see to read it. I remarked, "Perhaps you can't read." At which the orderly smiled and gave me a wink and the officer had objects to look after in other parts of the field. The orderly handed me the pass and said all right. And I was permitted to resume my work without further molestation. I found one of our boys sitting against a stump, semi-unconscious. Would rally when spoken to, but was unable to answer questions intelligently. I found a mule and took him back with me to the hospital that night. The wound was near the tip of the right ear and the ball lodged in close proximity to the optic nerve, as subsequent events proved. After being paroled and sent to Chattanooga, he was discharged from the service as unfit for duty. The wound soon healed and he enlisted and joined us at Goldsboro, N.C., apparently well so far as the healing of the gunshot wound, but on bending or stooping he would suddenly become blind. By throwing his head back with a sudden jerk, the sight would be restored again. He remained with us and was discharged with the regiment at close of the war.

On the 23rd. of September I succeeded in getting an ambulance and commenced bringing in the wounded, assisted by Dr. Blaker. We soon formed or detailed an ambulance corps for those slightly wounded and gathered them in as fast as possible. The Doctor and myself would go on alternate days and dress the wounds of those left, until they were all brought in. The dead and wounded lay upon the field as they fell, the confederate and union soldiers all mingled together. Fire had run through the woods and many of the dead were burned to a crisp; and those who were too severely wounded to move were burned alive, as I was informed by those who could move and crawled to a place of safety and heard their piteous cries for help without the power to render them any assistance. Among the first of the wounded brought in was Captain G.W. Smith, Company D., 21st. Michigan Infantry, shot in the knee joint. After amputation, I examined the wound and found a minnie ball and three buckshot. The Captain endured the operation with slight prostration, rallied well and bid fair to recovery when he left the hospital, but subsequently

died. The first day on the field I met General Anderson, of the confederate army, who informed me of the death of General Lytle, our brigade commander, and wrote in my diary the following: "General Lytle was buried about one and a half miles below Lee & Gordon's Mills, about one hundred yards below Hunt's Ferry on west bank of west Chickamauga, at or near General Davis' Confederate Hospital. Signed, "General Anderson." Also the following by Captain West: "General Lytle was buried at Hunt's Ford on the Chickamauga creek on the Chattanooga side of the river, left hand side of road going from Chattanooga." Signed, "Captain West", Inspector General, Hood's Staff." They also thought that Colonel Mc Greery was wounded and a prisoner, which I found to be true, while at Augusta Georgia when on my way to Libby Prison.

Our wounded suffered for the want of proper food. The hard-tack was soon exhausted and we had to feed them on boiled wheat, and I scorched some of the wheat to make them coffee.

There were quite a number of young cattle in the vicinity, and I asked the confederate officer in charge the privilege of killing one for our famished soldiers. He haughtily replied: "It would be a dear job for any of you d----d yanks to be caught at the likes of that." I then made up my mind that the boys should have some of that beef. And when the officer had gone to other parts of the field, I got four or five of the boys and pointed out the cattle in an adjoining field of corn stalks, and told them what the officer had said, and what the wounded boys must have or die. "All right," was the response, and in less than half an hour the beef was killed, dressed and cut into small pieces and brought to hospital, and that night was cooked and in the haversacks of the wounded comrades, and without its being detected by the southern confederacy.

On the 27th, amputated leg for William Gifford, Co. D, 36 Ill; 28th. amputated leg for Edward Glenn, Co. D, 24 Wis. Reg, comminuted fracture above ankle; 29th., assisted in amputating arm - don't remember name or regiment of the comrade. The same day the confederates took all who could walk away south to rebel prisons, and the surgeons had to help dig the graves of the dead and bury them, wrapped in their blankets without coffin or box. 29th., dressed wound for forty-six in my ward, and assisted in amputating thigh for a confederate soldier, Don't remember his name or the regiment. The number allotted me to look after was one hundred and sixty, and a Virginian Captain came to parole them and others in the hospital. I made several attempts to draw him into conversation, but he would only answer "yea" or "nay", and I ceased trying and kept busy in getting the names of the wounded and their signature to the

parole. After quite a long silence, the Captain asked, rather abruptly, "What are you doing here, anyway?" I asked: "Do you address me personally, or the army?" He remarked: "I mean youons army." I replied: "To put down the rebellion." He became very angry and said: "You can never conquer us, the last man will die in the ditch rather than submit to Yankee rule." I told him we intended to be master of the situation and had plenty of soldiers ready and willing to assist in the task; and if the south persisted in fighting to the last man, it would be a long time before they could inaugurate another rebellion. He drew his revolver and remarked he had a great mind to shoot me, and would were I not a non-combatant. The situation I was in caused me to remain silent, as further controversy might terminate unfavorable for me.

September 30th. our ambulance arrived from Chattanooga to convey our wounded through the lines for care and surgical treatment. There was a Lieutenant from one of our regiment that was slightly wounded in his left leg, who had succeeded in keeping his sword hid, and was very anxious to retain it as was a gift from friends at the north. I can't recall his name or regiment. I strapped his sword on the outside of his leg for one splint, and several splints to the other side with a large supply of batten and bandages, and had him taken to the ambulance on a stretcher and safely started on his journey to our lines, and trust he arrived safely and succeeded in concealing his sword from the confederacy.

The surgeons remained in camp until October 2nd., then they marched to Ringold, Ga. And the balance of the route to Richmond, Va. we had free transportation on cattle cars without benches or chairs, and the cars were filled so full that to lay down was impossible, and scant room to even sit on the bottom of the cars. At Atlanta we were put into the prison pen, an enclosure of some two or three acres, with no shelter save the heavens for a covering and the earth for a bed. During the night it was so cold we had to run to keep warm, and after sunrise and dry hardtack and cold water for breakfast, we would camp down on the ground for a few hours sleep, huddled together in groups like a lot of swine, (less the straw - a luxury not allowed a Yankee prisoner). There were several severely wounded union prisoners in the camp, and among the number I remember well a Captain with his leg amputated below the knee. The stitches had all torn out, and the flap dropped down leaving the bone exposed, and no dressing whatever on it, and a heavy ball and chain on his other leg. Death came to his relief the morning we left, and the rebs had kindness to remove the ball and chain after he was dead. They also had Colonel Jim Bronlow

with a ball and chain on his leg. I formed his acquaintance and he told me that he was to be tried by a southern court martial for treason; but he remarked: " I will surely be absent when that court convenes, for I have removed the iron rivet and placed in its stead a lead one, and I am going to scale the walls and take leave absence without their consent." Which I subsequently learned he had accomplished.

At this place we drew our first rations since September 20th., the day of our capture, which consisted of rancid bacon, corn meal, and no way of cooking it. Each one cut his portion of bacon into slices and roasted it on a stick and stowed it away in his haversack, leaving the meal for those who remained to use it best as they could.

October 10th we reached Petersburg at midnight, were marched to the open square and huddled together like so many cattle, and allowed the privilege of laying on the ground with the rebel guard marching around us. At sunrise we were ordered into line and marched to the depot, and started for Richmond. Arrived at Libby Prison at 8 A.M. There we were searched and all valuables were taken away, and we were informed that they considered greenbacks contraband of war and that if we attempted to conceal any, or it was known that we traded them for food or any article of merchandise, they would be confiscated. But if we would voluntarily surrender them, they would give us seven of their confederate script for one dollar of greenbacks. At any time we wished to make any purchases such as our wants required, and should there be any of our greenbacks left at our release from prison, they would be returned to us. And most of the prisoners gave up their money. I had the audacity to ask General Turner if his arrangement was not equivalent to entering into an agreement for trade and traffic, which would confiscate our money as stated. He became quite angry and said when he needed any of my counsel he would call for it. The consequence was, when we were exchanged, the clerk who took in our money or General Turner were not to be found. A new clerk called the roll and handed each man a bundle of confederate script, seven to one, already packed and the owner's name and amount were marked on it. Surgeon Blaker got for his portion twenty-eight hundred dollars for his four hundred of greenbacks. I took the precaution to sew mine in the lining of my pants and it was not discovered in the search. After all the preliminaries were performed we were assigned to the middle upper Chickamauga room. At which place we passed the dreary days and nights, the floor for a bed, our boots for a pillow and one piece of shelter tent for a blanket. A cold open room, no

windows, iron bars only to keep out the cold and snow from drifting in, until November 24th. when we heard the joyful call: "Surgeons, fall in for exchange," or rather a release from that hell hole. We were soon aboard the steamer bound for City Point, where our boat lay at anchor to receive us. But instead of going onto the steamer, we were landed on the dock and ordered into single file, and Commissioner Olds walked up and down the line several times, closely scrutinizing each face to our wonder as to the cause. When he stepped back and said: "Gentlemen, you have amongst your crowd a Colonel, and unless you give him up, you will all go back to Libby Prison tonight." All was silent as death for a few moments, when the Colonel stepped out and said: "Boys, I am the man wanted and I will not see you all confined to that dismal abode on my account." We were then transferred to our steamer and conveyed to Fortress Monroe; thence to Baltimore and Washinton, once more in God's country under the protecting folds of the Star Spangled Banner, a joyful, happy group, a feeling of happiness which words are inadequate to express.

This account has been copied from the original which was dictated to Dr. Harry Goodale's granddaughter, Lillian Goodale.