

December 1862 – The Battle & The Horror On The Field (101st Ohio) by Leslie Korenko

The drive to Stone River began on December 25 and Col. Lewis Zahm reported that they “Advanced toward Murfreesboro, skirmishing with the enemy’s cavalry all day. Lay on our arms in line of battle all night. Everything indicated that we were in the immediate presence of the main rebel army and that a great battle was imminent, and could not be delayed much longer.” The next day, December 31, Zahm reported: “We were early astir and in line, waiting for reports from the patrol sent out in our front. It was scarcely daylight when the sound of artillery and infantry firing off to our left and front brought the tidings that the battle had commenced. The roar of cannon and the rattle of musketry was terrific, showing that on one side or the other a desperate assault was being made, and we soon learned that it was the enemy that had commenced the attack, and that the troops on the right of the Union lines were being driven from their position, closely pursued by their victorious enemy. We were compelled to fall back to prevent being cut off by the enemy. At this point the ammunition train of General McCook was in great danger of being captured, when the Third Ohio was rallied for its protection, and repelling the repeated assaults of the enemy, held them at bay until the wagons moved out to a place of safety.”

It was in this battle that one island man, Simon Huntington, was mortally wounded. On January 31st, “the brigade started with a large train of wagons for Nashville. A short distance west of LaVerne we were attacked by General Wheeler’s division of cavalry, who made several desperate attempts to stampede and capture the train, but were finally driven off with considerable loss.” Col. Zahm later noted that “This was the first battlefield, in the West at least, where the Union cavalry had been used in large bodies. The Confederates had had the advantage of us in that they had consolidated their cavalry so that they were able to use it with effect, while the Union cavalry had been scattered in small bodies, and never were strong enough to accomplish any great results heretofore. But under the new order of things they proved themselves the equals of the Confederates in this arm of the service. The losses of the brigade, the First, Third and Fourth Ohio Regiments, at Stone’s River were: killed 18, wounded, 44, missing, 59; total, 121.”

A view of the battle of Stone River where Simon Huntington was fatally wounded.



The 101st Regiment, to which several island men were attached, also came under heavy fire. Lewis Day, who compiled an extensive history of the 101st Ohio, reported 39 soldiers killed or mortally wounded. Simon Huntington, who was wounded on December 31st, was the only soldier from Company A on that list. Lewis Day wrote, “Our regimental losses were heavy. Out of 420 men who stood in line at daylight on the 31st, 212 were either dead, mortally wounded, or captured. Nearly all this occurred on the first day.” A list containing 39 names of those either killed outright or mortally wounded told “a sad story, but only a part of it. The boys were mangled and torn in every conceivable way. Death came instantly to many, and many others lingered to awful torture. Many of those who were captured endured suffering which can never be described.”

For those that died on the field, Day wrote; “Arriving upon the field we selected our fallen comrades from the several piles, found one or two where they fell, carried a strange dead comrade or two to heaps of other dead, and then began the excavation of the trench, selecting a beautiful location beneath the boughs of a great tree, just within the edge of the woods near the cotton field where we formed our second line of battle on the 31st. We dug a trench six feet wide, five feet deep and long enough to contain all the bodies lying side by side. Then, wrapping each poor boy in the blanket donated him by a comrade friend, we reverently lowered the bodies into the trench, and having covered each with branches cut from the adjacent cotton bushes, to break

in appearance at least, the fall of the ground upon their bodies, we buried them in unbroken silence. Many a stout heart that had not for a moment quailed before the presence of the destroying enemy, broke down entirely in the presence of this sad sight.”

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