

THE FINAL CHARGE AT NASHVILLE

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All day long the battle surged and roared around us. In front the rebels driven to their last entrenchments, stood defiantly at bay, while on either side the long lines of Union troops pressed grimly up, answering back the volleys of their adversaries with floods of living fire, and on every commanding eminence the deep toned artillery pealed forth their incessant thunder, until the earth seemed trembling in agony and sorrow at the deeds of blood that were being enacted upon its bosom.

Leaving early in the morning, the ground upon which worn and weary with the marches and battles of the day before, we had thrown our lives to sleep soundly, despite the patter of the rain drops and stray shots of pickets—we had advanced nearly a mile forward and to the left of our former position into strong earthwork thrown up by the 23rd Corps, thence by the right flank we were moved into an open field through which ran a low rail fence, over which the swift winged bullets whistled musically and to some of our brave fellows sang the dirge of death. Finding the fire severe we were ordered to demolish the fence and throw up slight breastworks, which was done silently, rapidly and with little loss, and snugly ensconced behind our shelter we were discussing the past and conjecturing the future when the word was given—“Forward,” and on we moved again, “Forward,” toward

the enemy lines and over grounds which had been held in force by them the day before, past knapsacks and articles of clothing thrown away by the rebels in their hasty flight, or by our men who had stripped for the hot pursuit, past wounded soldiers lying in sheltered places, past stragglers who slunk to the rear with voluble excuses of hunger, or thirst, or sickness and fatigue—flimsy veils which only made more palpable the cowardice that wove them, past officers, newspaper correspondents and civilians sitting upon their horses and striving to pierce the clouds of smoke that rose eddying and dense before them, past boxes of ammunition being rapidly emptied and their contents distributed. Past batteries belching forth streams of death;—and in front of one planted upon a high rise of ground, we were deployed into line to lie down for a short rest until the last final effort.

The rebel line, their last and strongest, stood plain to view before us, the formidable earthworks stretching up and over the crest of a high hill and separated from our position by a valley through which ran an old wagon road. The right of our Brigade ran over an elevation but little inferior to that of the enemy, the left occupied by our regiment and especially the left of the regiment was posted nearly at its base, and so situated in regard to the enemy's works that when a direct charge was made a severe cross fire would be kept up—as the event proved—upon our troops as they moved over the intervening space.

The roar of musketry was ceaseless, Minnie balls hissed over and tore the ground around us, the artillery redoubled its fury shot and shell screamed through the air, branches of trees cut in twain by the iron storm fell crashing to the ground, and yet crouching to the earth as we lay beneath it all there seemed the stillness of death—we heard nothing save the beating of our own hearts too intense was the eagerness and anxiety for the coming struggle.

We had been victorious the day before—gloriously so. Wherever the foe had been met, they had been forced to yield, and two strong forts with their guns and prisoners had fallen into our hands with hardly the loss of a man. Was success still to go with us? Could those frowning heights, those strong entrenchments garrisoned by twice our number, the flower of Southern soldiery—Chetham's Corps—be carried by our single line in the face of such a withering fire as we should surely meet—and if conquerors, how many of our brave comrades, tried and true must sleep ere the honourous dawn, dead to our shouts of triumphs, heedless of our praises and congratulations.

And if the deadly missile should find us out, would it bear our life swift away into the dim mysterious future or leave us mangled, bleeding, to recover through sobs and tears of agony maimed and cripples to the end.

But there is little time for thought, the moment for action is at hand. Officers in low but earnest tones are giving instructions, cartridge boxes are replenished in silence—there is little laughing and jesting now. It is a desperate deed we are about to undertake, a desperate foe to dare and its importance sobers all. We fix bayonets lying upon the ground

and at the single blast of the bugle, rise, and steadily descend into the valley. Under orders to observe strict silence, not a shout is raised, not a gun discharged until we reach the road below, but calm and unwavering as if upon review, the long line moves onward. We strike the foot of the declivity and gaze up to the works looking so grimly down upon us and all order is at an end. "Forward brave boys!" "On with the First Brigade!" "Onward to Victory" and with a ringing cheer the line breaks up and each individual dashes forward with leveled gun like eager hunters resolved to be in at the death.

For half the distance we met but little check, the artillery and sharpshooters upon the hill to our rear keeping the rebels close to cover so that their shots have been almost at random, but as we mount upward the covering fire is necessarily withheld. Now bursts the storm of battle upon us a baptism of blood and fire, and the death angel swoops exultant through the sulphurous canopy.

A blaze of light runs round the ramparts, to our left a murderous cross fire plays un pityingly upon us. Companies "F" and "C" upon the extreme left seemed likely to be swept from existence. Major Cook and Captain White fall mortally wounded. Captains Kennedy and Saunders are disabled. Other officers are more or less injured. The dead and dying strew the ground.

Stunned, bruised and bleeding we halt upon a little bench of land not twelve yards from the works to gain a moment's breath and discharge our muskets full in the face of the foe. To the gaze of those low and upon our right it looks like a repulse. It *must* not be – the thought is maddening. "On Minnesotans!", "one more effort and the day's our own!"

Our Adjutant springs forward with uplifted sword and see—arm in the advance the gallant Colonel Jennison leads the way. The colors are borne by his side, and where're the banner floats even were it in the jaws of hell, the Tenth Minnesota must and *will* follow. They reach the breastworks together. They mount side by side and our flag streams from the summit. Our Colonel falls wounded, stricken to the earth in the first flush of victory, but his boys are close behind. They break over the ramparts like an angry wave; the rebels throw down their arms and sue for mercy or with nimble heels scurry through the leaves like flocks of frightened birds.

"And the red field is won"

Sixteen hundred prisoners, two Generals and nine pieces of artillery with small arms to match are the fruits of our victory; captured by a Brigade less than one thousand strong, and to our bravery and discipline upon this occasion, as well s to his own merits, our brigadier commander, General McMillan, owes his silver star.

Yet with the joy of triumph comes many a thought of sadness. Comrades who month after month have marched by our side, sharing with us danger and privation, comrades who have grown as dear to us as brothers lie dotting the steep hillside, their battles ended, their warfare over. Never more will they press with us shoulder to shoulder

as the bristling steel points sweep resistlessly on, never more in our hours of glee will their voices join in the merry jest or fill the air with laughter—they are gone.

We buried them where they fell upon the field of honor. Rough but kind hands scooped out their narrow beds, and with all of women's tenderness laid them to rest in a soldier's sepulcher.

And the everlasting mountains in the shadow of which they lie shall be their eternal monument; year after year the forest trees will shed their crowns of glory over them, and day by day the winds, as they sigh through Brentwood Hills, will chant a low, sad, requiem to their memory.