

An Account of the Battle of Perryville, Kentucky

as extracted from Campaigns & Battles of the Sixteenth Regiment, Tennessee Volunteers by
Thomas A. Head. Originally published in 1885.

This was the situation at Perryville on the morning of October 8, 1862. The Chaplin Creek runs through the center of the town. At this time there was no water in the channel of this creek about the town. Two miles below Perryville there was a depression in the channel of the creek. This depression was about two hundred yards long, the width of the entire channel, and filled with water to the depth of from two to four feet. When Buell became aware of the existence of this pool of water and a spring near by, he resolved to shift the scene of operations to this point. Sending a couple of infantry regiments in this direction, he continued to engage Hardee's skirmish lines and bore in the direction of the spring.

In the afternoon he commenced moving his whole army to the left. Polk was ordered to counteract this movement. Some Texas cavalry charged the advance-guard of two regiments about the time of their arrival at the spring and drove them back. Polk's corps was hurried to the right. Hastening down the Chaplin at a double-quick, it was formed in line of battle near the spring before mentioned. The enemy's advance having been checked by the Texas cavalry, formed a line of battle in double column about eight hundred yards from the top of the bluff, on the west bank of the Chaplin and on the east side of a hill. Polk's corps appeared before the bluff. Ascending the bluff in line of battle, by brigades, the top was gained with difficulty. Donelson's brigade was the first to gain the top of the heights. The enemy was posted in their front, in double column, eight hundred yards distant. The men were given a moment to rest at the top of the bluff, and the word "Forward" was given. The men obeyed with a yell.

For six hundred yards the ground was irregular, and having stone fences running, in different directions, the men scaled them without difficulty. At this point there was a slight trough-like depression in the ground, running parallel with the enemy's lines. As the Sixteenth Tennessee approached the lowest point of this depression the enemy opened a murderous fire upon them with musketry and artillery from right, left, and front. The-ranks of the Sixteenth Regiment were mowed down at a fearful rate, and the Fifteenth Regiment also suffered severely. The ranks closed up and the brigade pressed onward in the charge. Colonel Savage was with his men directing their movements as calmly as if it had been a regimental drill.

As the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Tennessee Regiments moved up the hill and came nearer to the enemy, the fight grew more and more desperate. Heavy charges of grape and canister were hurled into their ranks from the front and on the flanks. Stewart's brigade now came up and formed on the left of Donelson's brigade, by which support the Fifteenth Tennessee was partially relieved of the severe cross-fire upon its left wing.

Buell was still bearing to his left, and a heavy force was now massed in front, and on the right of the Sixteenth Tennessee Regiment. The enemy bending his line around the right flank of the Sixteenth Tennessee Regiment near an old log cabin, an enfilading fire of musketry and artillery was poured into its ranks; yet the regiment held its ground for half an hour, when Maney's brigade came up and formed on its right. General Maney charged this flanking party of the

enemy, and swung it around on its main line, forming an angle in the shape of the letter V. This opened the way for artillery, which was hurried to the scene, and planted at the point of the angle.

The battle on the right now raged with fury, and the slaughter was terrible. The enemy finally yielded this line and fell back to a lane at the top of the hill, about three hundred yards distant. In this lane he reformed his lines and planted his batteries. The Confederates were prompt to appropriate every inch of ground which they gained from the enemy, and were quickly pouring destructive volleys into his ranks along the lane. The enemy contested this ground stubbornly. The Confederates, pressed the assault with vigor.

The enemy, after losing several of his guns and many valuable officers, including two brigadier generals, yielded this line about sundown, and the battle ended for the day. The enemy retired to a timbered region about three miles from their first line of the evening. The Confederates held the field at night, and had gained a decided victory.

The losses on both sides had been heavy, and the battle, for the number of men and the length of time engaged, was the severest of the war. The Sixteenth Tennessee lost over two hundred men. The Eighth Tennessee suffered severely, as did also the Fifteenth Tennessee. of Donelson's, and the First Tennessee, of Maney's brigades. The Sixteenth Tennessee engaged the Thirty-third Ohio, and subsequently the Seventh Ohio, which was commanded by Colonel Oscar F. Moore.

Colonel Savage received two wounds early in the fight, and had his horse shot under him, but he remained on the field till the issue was decided. Late in the evening he became exhausted from loss of blood. Dr. Charles K. Mauzy, Surgeon of the Sixteenth Tennessee Regiment, dressed his wound, and Dr. Cross, the brigade chaplain, procured quarters for him in a farm-house, and attended him through the night. The Federal general, Jackson, was killed by Savage's men. A Federal colonel was brought in a prisoner, and severely wounded. This man proved to be Colonel Oscar F. Moore, said to be of the Seventh Ohio, and was personally acquainted with Colonel Savage in the United States Congress. He told Colonel Savage that his regiment had suffered severely, and had lost near half its number. Colonel Savage told the Federal officer the same of his own regiment. The two regiments had engaged each other through the day.

Both had suffered greatly, and the commander of each regiment was wounded, and one a prisoner. Colonel Savage assured Colonel Moore that he should have the best attention that it was in his power to bestow, and ordered the surgeons and attendants to bestow upon Colonel Moore the same attention they would bestow upon one of their own men. General Jackson and Colonel Savage had known each other in public life.

The wounded were cared for as well as the circumstances would allow. All who could travel were sent to Harrodsburg. Those not able to bear transportation were taken to the farm-houses of the neighborhood, where hospitals were established.

General Bragg withdrew his army early in the morning and returned to Harrodsburg. From Harrodsburg, he retreated to Camp Dick Robertson, and thence to Knoxville. The wounded

were left in the field hospitals and fell into the hands of the enemy. The dead were left on the field unburied. The enemy buried their own dead, but left the Confederate dead, which lay upon the field for four days. They were then partially buried by the people of Perryville and vicinity. The ground was very hard and then, were just merely covered up, and remained thus for six or eight weeks, when they were gathered up by the good people of the place and decently buried in one common grave-yard. Those who died of wounds were buried in the cemeteries at Harrodsburg and Perryville. The people of Perryville afforded every assistance in their power to the suffering of either army. As the Confederate wounded recovered they were paroled and sent to Vicksburg for exchange.