

*This memoir was written by John M. Copley. He had been living in Tennessee when he volunteered to fight with Co. B, 49<sup>th</sup> TN Infantry. Copley was 15 years old when he enlisted. He was taken prisoner twice – once in 1862 and once after the Battle of Franklin. After Franklin he spent the remainder of the war at Camp Douglas, Illinois.*

... Behind [the **breastworks**] the Federal troops were massed, and the ground seemed to be covered for a distance of fifty yards from the works with soldiers wearing the blue uniform, their guns and bayonets shining with a dazzling brightness in the sun. They appeared all the time to be in motion, forming lines of battle, one behind the other, as indicated by the positions of their blue banners and battle-flags ... **Courier** after courier on their horses could be seen galloping to and fro, as if carrying orders from one part of the position to another; their sappers and miners, or fatigue parties, seemed to be hard at work completing the **fortifications**; their spades and picks could be seen swiftly going up and down, and the dirt thrown from their spades flying to the top of the parapets....

As soon as the lines of battle were formed, a number of our field officers rode out a little in front of the lines,—they were Walthall, Loring, Cheatham, Quarles, Cleburne, Granberry, and perhaps others; these officers appeared to hold a brief consultation, during which we could see them cast doubting glances in the direction of the formidable foe in our front; and judging from the appearance of their grave and serious looks, we all knew that our commanders in some degree realized the depth of that yawning gulf of destruction which awaited them and us, and which only too soon would engulf us all. These officers separated, each taking his respective place with his command. A **profound** silence pervaded the entire army; it was simply awful, reminding one of those sickening **lulls** which precede a tremendous thunderstorm. This was but momentary. Orders now rang down our line, shrill and clear, to forward march!

...We were now ordered to fix bayonets, fire, and charge the first line of works. They received us with a **volley** of musketry, but all opposition was inadequate to **check** our columns in the slightest degree, and with one prolonged and loud cheer we carried the first line of works at the very points of the Federal bayonets. They stood their ground until we mounted the top of their works, but as we went over, part of their line of battle broke and fled, while the remainder lay down flat on their faces in the ditch to save themselves, and were either killed or captured; but few of those who fled succeeded in reaching their main line. Our lines of infantry swept over their works, **annihilating** nearly everything before us ... [after this partial victory] the air resounded with loud shouts from our whole army, which almost made the earth over which we were going quake and tremble.

After taking this line of works, we made a momentary halt in order to reform our front line, but this was only for an instant ... here the battery of thirty-six guns a little to our right, and that of twelve guns on our left, all double charged with grape and canister, pointing down our lines from both directions, thus **enfilading** them both ways from end to end, sent a tremendous deluge of shot and shell through our ranks, and these seconded by a murderous sheet of fire and lead from the infantry behind the works, and also another battery of six guns directly in our front, made the scene of carnage and destruction fearful to behold.

This hurricane of combustibles now burst forth in its height of fury, leaving ruin and desolation in its pathway, and nothing could be heard above the **din** of **musketry** and the roar of cannon, which was **incessant**. They fired on friend and foe, for we so closely pressed the retreating line in our front that had they waited for their own men to enter the works we would have gone over with them, and carried all before us. Whenever the dense smoke, in some degree, was cleared away by the flash and blaze from the guns, great masses of our infantry could be seen struggling to get over those ingeniously wrought obstructions, who were being slain by hundreds and piled in almost countless numbers. In the confusion which here **ensued**, numbers of our forces were thrown farther to the left and near the pike, forming a confused body of soldiers who were totally **oblivious** to all sense of order, thus giving the [batteries] full play upon them. The firing of these guns was so rapid that it was impossible to discover any **interval** between their discharges.

... The force and wind of the **grape** and **canister**, when fired from the fifty-four pieces of cannon on the Federal works, aided by that of the minié balls from their infantry behind the works, would lift us clear off the ground at every discharge. As the great clouds of smoke had to some extent vanished and I could look around me, I saw to my surprise I was left alone in the ditch, within a few feet and to the left of the battery of six guns on the Federal works, which was still pouring forth its messengers of death, and not a living man could be seen standing on my right; neither could one be seen for some distance on my left. They had all been swept away by that mighty tempest of grape and canister and rolling waves of fire and lead.

... [I] tried my best to shoot the artillerymen who were so skillfully and effectively manning that destructive battery, and whose gun **swabs** would whirl in the air after every discharge, but each time I obtained a glimpse of any of them, and before I could shoot, a cannon would run out and fire, forcing me to take refuge away from it. After getting my face blistered and eyebrows burned off, I abandoned that dangerous place by getting back away from the blaze of these guns.

Streams of blood ran here and there over the entire battle ground, in little branches, and one could have walked upon dead and wounded men from one end of the column to the other; the ditch was full of dead men and we had to stand and sit upon them,—the bottom of it, from side to side, was covered with blood to the depth of the shoe soles.

At the ditch we had to encounter an enfilading fire of musketry from both directions, as well as that in our front across the works under the head-logs. The enemy directly in our front attempted to shoot us by turning their backs to the breastworks, taking their guns by the breach and raising them above their heads over the head-logs, so as to point the muzzles downward, firing them at us this way, and having nothing exposed except their arms and hands. We had to watch this and knock their guns aside with our bayonets, which was done several times; many of their men had both hands shot off while making these attempts to kill us. While this fearful battle was raging, a Federal officer on his horse, at the head of a line of infantry, came dashing up to the works in our front, and one of our soldiers in the ditch about ten feet on my left, raised his gun and fired, shooting him off his horse ...

...At the residence and in the yard of Mr. Carter his son was killed dead. He had not been at home for two or three years, and as he passed through the yard and stopped at the door his sister ran and caught him by the hand and attempted to throw her arms around his neck, when a Federal soldier, who had taken refuge in the house, ran up and shot him through the body, killing him dead in the arms of his sister...

... The carnage and destruction was so dreadful that the sun, as if **loath** to longer gaze on this terrific scene, slowly sunk behind the western horizon and hid from view his smiling face; but the stars, more pitying, came forth to keep vigil o'er the silent and sleeping dead.

As the firing from the enemy in our front began somewhat to **abate**, sixteen of our soldiers, who were in the ditch some twenty or thirty feet on my left, sprang up and ran out of the ditch, attempting to escape; a whole volley of musketry was fired at them, killing the last one to a man. When they started I raised in a stooping posture, thinking I would run also; but they being killed so quickly caused me to abandon the idea of escape. The few of us who were alive at the ditch were in considerable danger from our own batteries and stray minié balls. We tried to lie down in the ditch; it afforded **scant** protection, being almost full of dead men....

**John M. Copley**

***A Sketch of the Battle of Franklin, Tenn.; with Reminiscences of Camp Douglas.***

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