ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Eyewitness to the Apocalypse: The Battle of Franklin, November 30, 1864

By **Wiley Sword**

It was a gigantic struggle. The man thought, pondered, and grappled for the correct description. How, in a few words could he convey the essence of what he had been through at Franklin? The ordeal truly was beyond words or a full understanding. Deep seated emotions were rampant, but there was no simple language to encapsulate the ultimate personal terror amid unsurpassed martial splendor that he had witnessed. Finally, he acquiesced. The best he could conjure as the essence of the full impact was "The Thunder Drum of War." It was his best concession to explaining the ultimate of personal ordeals.[1]

Franklin, as the epitome of the South's "Last Hurrah," was a battle whose full meaning few could comprehend. One of the most destructive of major Civil War conflicts, Franklin was perhaps both an ultimate display of Southern valor, and yet abject martial insanity. To explain it all was impossible; to provide a measure of understanding was really the best hope. Yet the reality remained—stark and foreboding within the context of extreme human endeavor.

Even today, nearly one-hundred and fifty years beyond these tragic events, there is an unexplainable quality to Franklin that will forever remain untold despite the best efforts of historians, or even in the accounts of the soldiers who were there. Certainly, the comprehensive outline of what happened, why it occurred, and how it took place has been addressed in various non-fiction books from James Lee McDonough's *Five Tragic Hours* (1984) to Wiley Sword's *Embrace an Angry Wind* (1992) and Eric Jacobson's *For Cause and For Country* (2007). [2] Yet beyond these works there is more to be said and comprehended as an added measure of the whole story. Through the eyes of those who experienced Franklin and its related campaign a rather unique perspective is possible. Rather than trying to encompass all, these observers set the tone in relating personal details of their experiences within the larger specific events, often with a candor or

[1] Wesley S. Thirston, *History of the 111th Regiment Ohio Volunteer Infantry* (Toledo, OH: Vrooman, Anderson & Bateman, Printers, 1894), 87.

[2] James L McDonough and Thomas L. Connelly, *Five Tragic Hours: The Battle of Franklin* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983); Wiley Sword, *Embrace an Angry Wind: The Confederacy's Last Hurrah: Spring Hill, Franklin and Nashville* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992); Eric A. Jacobson and Richard A. Rupp, *For Cause & For Country: A Study of the Affair at Spring Hill and the Battle of Franklin* (Franklin, TN: O'More Publishing, 2007).

perspective that conveys raw emotion—which seems to be the real bottom line of such stirring events as Franklin turned out to be.

Franklin, even today, remains as an emotional knot in the throat of our existence as a nation. To emphasize this aspect, here then are bits and pieces of the whole story—presented largely in original accounts as a modicum of the greater story—the essence of what being an American really means in terms of moral character.

Sarah North Martin was a wide-eyed resident of Columbia, Tennessee in November 1864 as both the Union and Confederate armies swept through the town during Southern General John Bell Hood's "invasion" of Tennessee. Sarah, the wife of a prominent local judge, William P. Martin, was taken by surprise on November 24, 1864 when two brigades of Union infantry under Brigadier General Jacob Dolson Cox Jr. hastily occupied adjacent ground on the Mount Pleasant Road near Bigby Creek. They were hardly in position before Union cavalrymen under Colonel Horace Capron came thundering down the crushed gravel road, fleeing from several brigades of Lieutenant General Nathan Bedford Forrest's Confederate cavalry under Brigadier General James Ronald Chalmers. Cox had three artillery batteries along with his troops on both sides of the road, and they easily halted Chalmers' troopers with several volleys of rifle fire and a few blasts of canister. Yet when more Confederate troops later arrived there was a renewed crescendo of gunfire as the attacking Rebels sought to displace the Yankees. Sarah Martin's thoughts as she and her family raced to escape, were soon the content of a remarkable letter she sent to a relative:

> The fighting commenced at our house, which is situated about 50 yards from the road on a high hill. I dare not write the particulars. Suffice it to say the Yankees had possession of our home & forced us to leave. We went to Mr. Martin's fathers' [i.e. George M. Martin], about 800 yards nearer town, taking with us the bedding of three beds & most of our wearing apparel. We were between the fires of the two contending parties for two days, & five shells struck [his] father's house while [we] were in it, until we had to go down to a brick milk cellar in the yard, the minie balls falling on the roof like hail. The wounded Yankees [kept] passing through the yard, bleeding & screaming with pain. We could hear the yells of the Rebels as they charged & drove the Yankees toward town. At last, when the fight was evidently beyond us, I ran out quickly to avoid the sharpshooters, & entering the [George M. Martin] house, found Gen. [Colonel Edmund Winchester] Rucker's staff, who showed us every courtesy. Each officer took charge of one of us, & led us in the line of the house, over to [our] home; procured an ambulance and sent us down to Gen. Pillow's. [this was "Clifton," four miles west of Columbia, the home of Brigadier General Gideon Johnson Pillow, who was married to her husband's sister (Mary Martin Pillow)] Gen. [Brigadier General Stephen Dill] Lee had possession of our house, & artillery was planted in several places on the hill. The Yankees [had] sacked our house, & set fire to it, but Forrest came in time to extinguish the flames, before any serious damage was done. They [Yankees] threw our wheat into the pond, burned piles of

> bed clothes & books, & threw our china all over the yard, took the most of twenty-two hogs, and killed nineteen shoats, took all our horses, etc. In short I cannot enumerate our loss, or tell you how the Yankees treated us. We have ever since been living on biscuit[s] & milk, without a parcel of meat, for we have no money to buy with. You can have no conception of the oppression, & we dare not murmur. Even yesterday they came & took the only animal we had, a mule. Judge M. [i.e. her husband Judge William P. Martin] walked to town to day in the rain to try to get it back, but was unsuccessful, & now we have nothing to plow with, or to haul wood, for we had been driven to hauling wood in a cart. We are very anxious to sell & move to Texas… All our negroes ran off during the fight, & went with the Yankees in their retreat to Nashville. Some of them want to come back, but we will not receive them. The Lord has mercifully preserved our health, & I hope will bring us safely through these troublous times. [3]

The combat at Columbia, Tennessee on November 24, 1864 was far from the devastation in lives and property wrought by the vicious Battle of Franklin, fought six days later. Yet, for the stunned Martin family, caught up in this initial fighting, it was a precursor to a horror they had never envisioned. Even to civilians the war had come visiting in a grim personal sense, wreaking despair and agony. The whole devastation that encompassed Franklin thus had actually begun prior to the battle itself. While the main fighting days later would claim a vast number of victims, for Sarah and her family their lives had already witnessed dire upheaval. Perhaps it was the vicious nature of war itself, but as civilians the Martins would never forget the onset of the Franklin experience; they somehow had to endure and find a new beginning, even if all but their lives and their will to survive had been lost.

Major William Jere Crook was a veteran Confederate officer who had extensive combat service from 1861 forward. Thus, his contemplation of the Tennessee Campaign just prior to their actual departure was troublesome. Having advanced from captain to major, Crook had led his men throughout the vicious fighting at Chickamauga, Missionary Ridge, and the Atlanta Campaign. His leadership of Company I, 13th Tennessee Volunteer Infantry dated from Aug. 14, 1861, when the original captain, Griffin Ross, resigned. Advanced from corporal directly to captain by popular election, Crook led his company at Shiloh, where the 13th captured much of Waterhouse's Battery near Shiloh Church. At Stones River, December 31, 1862, he was commended by Colonel Alfred Jefferson Vaughan Jr. but was dangerously wounded and captured. Exchanged in early 1863, after serving through the arduous campaigns of that summer and fall, Jere Crook was promoted to major November 18, 1863, and placed in command of the consolidated 13th Tennessee and 154th Tennessee regiments in the Atlanta Campaign. During the six months John Bell Hood commanded the Army of Tennessee, Crook took part in the severe fighting at Atlanta on July 22, and was noted for his valor

[3] Sarah N. Martin to her brother, incomplete letter ca. Dec. 1864., Columbia, TN.. Wiley Sword Collection, Suwanee, GA, item #587.

in combat. The Atlanta fighting had resulted in heavy losses and disheartening results, but he hadn't given up reliance on God for his safety. As further revealed in a November 16th letter to his fiancé, just prior to marching north into Tennessee on November 21,1864 he was apprehensive about the pending campaign:

> Head Quts. 154th & 13th Tenn. Regts./ Florence, Ala. Nov. 16th 1864
>
> Dear Hattie
>
> I wrote you last Saturday [the] 12th. I did not at that time think I would have an opportunity to write again for some days, thinking immediately after crossing the river we would move toward mid-Tenn. Our movements have been greatly retarded by the great rise in the river, making it very difficult to keep the pontoons in order. Our corps crossed last Sunday. Since then the whole time has been taken bringing over our artillery and supplies. The bridge has broken several times, but no great loss sustained. It is no small affair to bridge so long and rapid a stream as the Tenn. River. Stewart's Corps is still on the Tuscumbia side. [I] expect it across daily. It is generally believed we will leave here Friday morning, [the] 18th. But I will not risk another opinion, [as] I have missed so often. We have certainly been much longer delayed here than was expected by anyone. A portion of [Nathan Bedford] Forrest's command has arrived. ...Forrest has been doing good work recently, an acct. of which you have seen in the paper. He is here in person. My regt. went downtown and serenaded Genls. Hood, Forrest, and Gov. [Isham Green] Harris night before last. [We] had nice speeches and splendid music. Genl. Hood told us we had an arduous campaign before us, and hard fighting to do, but he felt confident we would be successful. I had almost hoped we would have no more general engagements; that some turn in affairs would carry us to the desired haven without further bloodshed. But alas, it cannot be. Many more of our gallant boys must be sacrificed ere the goal is attained. God alone can tell who the martyrs must be. In one of your recent letters you make the remark that I have almost miraculously escaped in the past, but that you trembled for the future. It does seem wonderful that I have passed unharmed through such an ordeal. I attribute it alone to the mercies of an over-ruling Providence, and to his guardian care I commit myself for the future. I feel sad when I think of the crimsoned fields just ahead of us; of the conflict in which we will soon be engaged. But the path of duty is before me. In its footprints I must tread. The cause of my country pleads to be avenged of her wrongs. Youth, insouciancy, and old age tell their tales of sorrow and cruelty received at the hands of a brutal, merciless foe. These things nerve my arm for tasks assigned it, and I am ready to follow my country's call. Dear Hattie, . . . Ask God to preserve [us] from danger and temptation; to bless our engagement, and permit us to meet and consummate it and lead a life of happiness with each other, and of honor and usefulness to those around us. This has been my daily prayer for almost two long years. ... Tis very rainy this evening; everything looks very cheerless and gloomy. [It] almost gives me the

> blues. If we leave tomorrow as I have just learned we would be, we will have a muddy time of it...
>
> Truly and affectionately,
>
> W. J. Crook[4]

Despite his apprehension, Jere Crook was again most fortunate. He became sick while at Columbia, Tennessee about November 27, and was left there when Hood's troops marched to Spring Hill on the 29th. Accordingly he missed the carnage at Franklin on the 30th, a development he later again considered "almost Providential." Mercifully, he had escaped probable death or severe injury, since nearly all the field officers of his division [Major General John Calvin Brown's (Cheatham's Old Division)] were killed or wounded, and every general officer in the division was a casualty. Following Franklin, within six months the war was over, and Jere returned to Tennessee, married his cousin Hattie, and survived until January 10, 1881. Fortunately some of his war date letters remain, including a few deposited at the University of Tennessee Library, Special Collections at Knoxville.

The major intention of the Confederate Army of Tennessee to march northward and attack the Union troops on their withdrawal toward Nashville, Tennessee was highlighted by the strange events at Spring Hill, Tennessee on November 29, 1864. Having devised a brilliant plan to trap most of the Union blocking force under Major General John McAllister Schofield, still awaiting the Rebels' advance on the north bank of the Duck River at Columbia, Tennessee, Confederate General John Bell Hood swung his troops wide to the east of Columbia that morning, crossed the Duck River, then marched rapidly north to Spring Hill, twelve miles distant. Thus they virtually trapped the lingering Schofield near Columbia. By late afternoon, the deployed Confederate lines around Spring Hill were poised to cut off and severely defeat if not capture Schofield's troops, most of which were only then belatedly moving north toward Spring Hill. It seemed that it would take a miracle to save Schofield and his men. Indeed, the trapped Union soldiers, hastily scurrying along the Columbia-Spring Hill Pike, were apprehensive and on edge. Could they possibly get past the enemy's swelling ranks, even then deployed in line of battle and overlooking the road into Spring Hill? Sergeant William Farries, Company E, 24th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry, as part of Colonel Samuel Emerson Opdycke's brigade, was in the vanguard of Schofield's retreat northward, in charge of a wagon train. Farries wrote days later of the frightening scenes he was an eyewitness to:

> Early on the morning of the 29th [November, 1864] the army was again in motion with the 1st Brig., 2nd Div., 4th Corps in the advance [marching north from Columbia, Tennessee]. On arriving at the Franklin Pike they were halted until 9

[4] Major William J. Crook, 13th/154th Tennessee Infantry, C.S.A.to "Hattie", Nov. 16-17, 1864.Wiley Sword Collection, item #735.

A.M. in order to let the rear of the train cross a small stream a short distance in front of us. After crossing the stream, the 2nd Div. passed the train, which immediately filed in their rear. The troops moved briskly, and before noon the village of Spring Hill was in sight. Just as our advance was entering the village, an orderly galloped up to Gen. [George Day] Wagner and told him that the Rebel cavalry, in force, were only a short distance south of the village, and they were advancing rapidly. The 1st Brig. was ordered forward on the double quick. After passing through the village, they were formed in line of battle, and the 88th [and] 74th Illinois were deployed as skirmishers. The enemy were in plain sight in the edge of a piece of woods about a mile distant. They were formed in line with dismounted skirmishers two hundred yards in advance of the main line. Col. Opdyke [sic] not liking the position his brigade occupied, advanced them two or three hundred yards to a line of fence, which he ordered them to tear down and form into a slight barricade, which would in some measure protect them if the enemy should charge. In the meantime, a section of artillery had been planted in the edge of the village, and our skirmishers were ordered to advance and occupy a slight elevation in their front. While executing this movement, two co[mpanies] of cavalry dashed forward and charged our skirmishers, but a shot from the battery, which blew one of the Rebels off his horse, sent them back faster than they came. The Rebels then abandoned the front of the 1st Brigade, and moved over to the right, where the rest of the division was in line, and skirmished with them until after dark. During the fight, the wagon train had been hurrying [forward], and by sunset the greater portion of it was 'corralled' close to the village. About an hour before dark the whole brigade was placed on picket with instructions to shoot every person that attempted to approach the line. All night long the train and the rest of the army were moving toward Franklin, and about an hour before daylight the last of them had passed Spring Hill. The pickets were then called in and formed in line of battle on each side of the pike, to act as rear guard. After waiting a short time and no enemy appearing, they were about faced and marched in line of battle toward Franklin. The formation of the ground made this extremely difficult. At times the mud was more than shoe deep, and the fences, hills, and small streams which they had to wade impeded their progress. The Rebel skirmishers kept close to their heels, and [persisted in] giving the skirmishers a volley whenever they could get an opportunity. But no large force of Rebels appeared, and before noon they [Opdycke's rear guard] had reached the range of hills one [actually two] mile south of Franklin. They had scarcely reached this position when the Rebel cavalry was seen in considerable force about two miles from their left. But [then] seeing that the Union force was beyond their reach, they moved off toward [the] Harpeth River. The 1st Brig. stayed in that position about an hour watching the Rebel infantry filing off the pike and forming into line of battle, when [belatedly] they were recalled and moved into Franklin where they got their breakfast. They had scarcely finished their meals when the Rebels, preceded by a heavy line of skirmishers, burst like an avalanche on our forces.[5]

[5] Sergeant William Farries, Company E, 24th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry, incomplete letter entitled

The Confederate failure at Spring Hill would bring recriminations that lasted the entire lifetimes of the principals. Garbled communications and faulty leadership amid critical circumstances had obscured the urgency of acting decisively within the two hours of daylight remaining following the Confederates late afternoon arrival at Spring Hill on November 29. The crippled General John Bell Hood, fatigued from being in the saddle since 3:00 a.m., left tactical control of operations in the hands of Major General Benjamin Franklin "Frank" Cheatham, went to the rear to rest, and by early that evening was in bed. Cheatham's inability to cut off the enemy's major escape route, the Columbia Pike, led to severe resentment the following morning when Hood awoke and learned that the enemy had escaped past the deployed Confederate ranks to Franklin, twelve miles distant. Described as being as wrathy as a rattlesnake, Hood denounced his subordinate generals for a lack of aggressiveness at a hasty meeting on the morning of November 30. Only belatedly, as the day wore on, did he learn that the Union army's escape was in doubt.

At first expecting that Schofield's troops would not halt short of Nashville, Hood, in personally riding along the road to Franklin later that morning, saw evidence of what he soon believed was the enemy's total demoralization. Vast quantities of abandoned equipment and other debris convinced him that the enemy's flight was in desperation. Then, when Forrest's cavalry sent word that the entire Yankee army was observed within the village of Franklin, attempting to get across the Harpeth River on two makeshift bridges, Hood seemed to consider that Schofield had been brought to bay after all. A personal reconnaissance from the top of Winstead Hill, two miles south of Franklin, further convinced him that the enemy's crossing of the Harpeth was greatly delayed, thus this seemed a prime opportunity to attack a trapped enemy. Immediately, the Confederate commander ordered a massive frontal assault before the enemy could escape. To emphasize his anger and frustration at the previous days' events, Hood ordered Frank Cheatham's soldiers to be his shock troops that day; they would charge in the center, where the enemy's resistance was sure to be the strongest. He later said he sought to purge their ranks of what he believed was a reluctance to fight unless behind breastworks. Among Cheatham's wary division commanders was the brilliant combat general Major General Patrick Ronayne Cleburne, who when he learned the army would attack across two miles of open ground against strong, fortified enemy lines, protested to no avail. To his subordinate officers, who also questioned the wisdom of a frontal attack across the vast open ground, he replied, "If we are to die, let us die like men." [6]

Cleburne was not mistaken. November 30, 1864 would be a day that lives in history as witnessing perhaps the Civil War's most gross spectacle. Much as a reactive aftermath to the almost inexplicable escape of Schofield's troops past Spring Hill the day before, Franklin was, indeed, a terrible and decisively ruinous event. What had bedeviled

Account of the part taken by the 1st Brigade, 2nd Division, 4th Army Corps in the Skirmish at Spring Hill and the Battle of Franklin, ca. Dec. 1864. Wiley Sword Collection, item #242-5.

[6] Wiley Sword, *Embrace an Angry Wind: The Confederacy's Last Hurrah: Spring Hill, Franklin and Nashville* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 152-8, 177-80.

the Confederate army at Spring Hill was in great measure paid for at Franklin, only hours later.

At about 4:00 p.m. the deployed Confederate Army of Tennessee, about 23,000 strong, began marching toward the frowning rifle muzzles of about 20,000 Union soldiers and eight poised batteries of artillery in their fortified earthworks on the perimeter of Franklin. It was a spectacle unsurpassed. From the descriptions of eyewitnesses it was a scene never to be forgotten nor dismissed in eventual obscurity. The advancing Confederate army stretched for nearly two miles across the open plain. The weather was mild, Indian-summer-like, and the sound of the soldiers' marching feet made a sound like "the hollow rumble of distant thunder," noted a participant. Waving above the massive ranks of glistening steel were dozens of the familiar St. Andrews Cross Confederate Battle Flags. Ahead of this moving avalanche of gray, jackrabbits bounded in wild fright, and coveys of quail burst into swirling flight, whirring over the waiting Union lines in their search for shelter. Bands were playing "Dixie" and "The Bonnie Blue Flag." It was the most magnificent sight he had ever seen wrote a stunned observer. This living wall of men seemed grand, awesome, and terrible, all at once.[7]

Jolting everyone to their senses, a section of three inch rifled guns suddenly opened with a roar, firing shell at a range of about 400 yards into Cheatham's lines. It was about 4:10 p.m., and thereafter only chaos reigned on that god-forsaken plain at Franklin. From the pen of several Union participants we are given a sprinkling of the terror of the hand to hand combat that Franklin swiftly became.

Corporal J. A. Morlan of the 107th Illinois was a defender at The Locust Grove, against Confederate Brigadier General Henry Rootes Jackson's Georgians. His commentary was written two days later, and still reeks of the dire emotion of that awful fight:

> Nashville, Tenn Dec. 2nd [18]64
>
> My dear Parents
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> I suppose ere this reaches you that you will have heard of the last big battle which our corps [23rd] and one div[ision] of the 4th Corps fought on the eve[ning] and night of the 30th. I thank God that through his merciful providence I came out all right—safe and sound without a scratch. But it was the hardest battle I ever saw. They attacked us about 4 P.M., just as we had got our works done. The[y] charged us with three lines and fought with the most determination I ever saw. There were seven or eight stands of colors planted on our regt's works, and the top of the works [was] lined thick with Rebs three or four times. But we shot, bayoneted, and knocked them off with the butts of our guns. They made three separate and distinct grand charges, but we drove them back every time. And they

[7]I.G. Bennett and William M. Haigh, *History of the 36th Regiment Illinois Volunteers During the War of the Rebellion* (Aurora IL: Knickerbocker & Holder, 1876), 650.

> rallied and came back 20 or 30 times, but did not reach our works but three times. There were 2 killed and 6 wounded in our company, and 1 missing. ...
>
> I sent you this morning's paper containing a partial acct. of the fight, but they are mistaken about the fight closing at dark, for it lasted seven hours; five of them were the longest, hottest hours I ever saw. I will send you a list of the killed and wounded as soon as published. As ever your son,
>
> Andrew [Morlan][8]

At the very storm center of the battle was the 24th Wisconsin of Colonel Emerson Opdycke's brigade. This brigade was the key factor in repulsing Cheatham's main Confederate onslaught at the Carter house, led by Cleburne's and Major General John Calvin Brown's Divisions. Having withdrawn from the advanced position of Brig. Gen. George D. Wagner's division in front of the breastworks (without orders prior to the opening of the battle so as to rest and cook their breakfasts), Opdycke's men were by accident strategically placed just north of the Carter house to confront the breakthrough of Cleburne's and Brown's men during the main onslaught. In a whirlwind of hand to hand fighting that was perhaps the most intense of the battle, Opdycke's seven regiments, including the 24th Wisconsin, were able to beat back the Rebels after a prolonged slaughter. Just how vicious the fighting became was indicated by Sergeant. William Farries of Co. E, 24th Wisconsin about a month later, when the unit's battered Franklin flag was about to be replaced by a new banner: "The new flag that we got last spring looks almost as bad as the old one. The Rebels almost cut it to pieces at Franklin; the staff was struck five times, and there is scarcely six inches square of it that has not been pierced by a [rifle] ball. If the Rebels had not fired so high [at the flag] they would have killed a great many more of us." [9]

To the survivors of four hours of desperate fighting that carried well into the night hours, there was an absolute terror that engulfed the riflemen on both sides. So devastating was the small arms and artillery fire from the Union breastworks after the initial attacks were beaten off, that the Confederates could neither withdraw or advance. Trapped in an all-too-shallow ditch beneath the glowering enemy muzzles, the Confederates' repeated desperate attempts to again sweep over the barricades, or else crawl away were met with a crescendo of fire that quickly caused them to again crowd back into that awful ditch. So many were there, amid both the wounded and dead, that the ditch became drenched with pools of blood. There was nowhere to go, and even to attempt resistance seemed almost certain suicide. Some men even began chewing on their fingers amid this total terror and their intense pain, so as to keep from crying out like wild animals. Most survivors merely cringed in shock and terror, many burrowing under the bodies of the dead and wounded as shelter from incoming fire from the exposed flanks

[8] Sword, *Embrace an Angry Wind*, 184-9; Corporal J. Andrew Morlan , Company D, 107th Illinois Volunteer Infantry, to My dear Parents, Dec. 2, 1864. Wiley Sword Collection, item #699.
[9] Sergeant William Ferries, Company E, 24th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry to his brother, Jan. 16, 1865.Wiley Sword Collection, item #240.

(due to varying angles in the breastworks, especially at the Carter Cotton Gin, an enfilade fire on the Rebels heaped in the ditches below continued to take a grisly toll). Until nightfall concealed the gory scene and enabled some to slowly crawl back to the distant Confederate lines, there was only the solace of prayer and a fitful, eerie hope. As one wide-eyed Union rifleman commented in almost sheer disbelief a few days following the Franklin fighting, humanity was perhaps witnessed at both its best and worst in the cruel events amid that seemingly interminable major combat. It was inexperience and near panic that resulted in much of this later realized the soldier, Private Isaac Miller of Company E, 93rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry. Almost casually, he reported two days later of the experience of an entirely new regiment, the 175th Ohio in fighting near the Carter Cotton Gin: [10]

> Nashville, Tenn. December 2/ [18]64
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> Dear Brother:
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> I sit down this afternoon to let you know how I am and what we are doing. Well, the troops are marching around getting into position. I guess we have got even. The Rebels are forming their lines in front of us, and I guess we will have a fight. We had a pretty tough time retreating from Pulaski, but .. . I guess you will hear of the great fight at Franklin before you get this. We were just leaving as it commenced. I saw about 1,000 of the Johnnies that our men took, and they say that they just piled them up in front of the works. I was talking with one of the 175[th] O[hio] V[olunteer] I[nfantry] boys. They was in the fight. They had what they call arbaties [abattis] in front of the works - that is, brush and sharp pointed stakes, so that a man can't hardly get through them at all. The Rebels charged up to them and could not get over, and they hollered to the boys to cease firing - they would surrender. But they [the 175th Ohio] were a new regiment and [this was] the first fight they had been in, so they just kept firing away at them, and would not let them surrender. So much the better. All they kill, we won't have to fight or feed [as prisoners] anymore. . . . . [Isaac Miller] [11]

Franklin's tragedy was not long in being fulfilled. With the withdrawal of Schofield's forces to Nashville that night after the repair of the two Harpeth River bridges, there was only the corpse littered, smoldering battlefield to contemplate the following morning as the disbelieving Confederates wandered over the battlefield. So intense had been the fighting in front of the breastworks that the ground was piled with bodies, and even the ground there was furrowed, giving it the appearance of a plowed farmer's field. Six Southern general officers had been slain, including the incomparable

[10] For descriptions of the grisly ditch at Franklin see: Wiley Sword, *Embrace an Angry Wind*, 210-11, 224-5.

[11] Private Isaac Miller, Company E, 93rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry to Brother, Dec. 2, 1864. Wiley Sword Collection, item #85.

Pat Cleburne, and the total Confederate casualties numbered about 7,000, including sixty-five commanders of divisions, brigades, or regiments. [12]

Yet all the misery and suffering had not ended. Ahead was the more disastrously complete defeat at Nashville on Dec. 15 and 16 1864, which literally destroyed Hood's army. When the remnant of the Army of Tennessee returned to Tupelo, Mississippi after little more than a month's campaign, Hood had lost about 24,000 men from what had once numbered about 38,000. Indeed, in mid-January 1865 there were only about 14,000 men remaining of his once formidable army. The reaction was immediate: A Mississippi sergeant of Sears' Brigade thought about the meaning of it all and wrote: "My heart is full of tears. [Hood's campaign] is the most disastrous of any we have yet sustained. When I reflect on all the woes and misery, on the thousands of slain and maimed heroes who have poured out their blood as water, I feel a wild spirit of resentment. The real sentiment of this army is for peace on almost any terms." [13]

So it would be. In pondering the numbing tragedy of Franklin and Nashville, a former combat colonel whose wounds had compelled him to avoid field service and subsequently become a Confederate senator (Tennessee), grimaced in the aftermath:

Richmond, Va./ Jan. 12, 1865

Mr. H. Reynolds:

> Dear Sir, After much trouble and effort we arrived safely in Richmond. I found a good deal of uneasiness in regard to our military situation. Hood's army has met with a serious defeat at Nashville, and is now at Tupelo, Mississippi. ...Hood's defeat endangers our situation more than usual. The loss, however, is not irreversible. Congress is now at work earnestly. All that can be done will be done to fill up the army and prepare for the spring campaign. ... Confederate Treasury Notes were, on yesterday, about $60 for one in gold, the result of a sort of panic in regard to our military situation and the defeat of Gen. Hood. ... Yours truly, Landon C. Haynes [14]

Franklin was perhaps the epitome of a Southern military disaster. Yet the valor of the men in making an almost hopeless battlefield assault was a legacy that endures even today as part of our most worthy national heritage. These soldiers had met one of life's severest challenges and some had survived; indeed, in facing that terrible hell-on-

[12] Sword, *Embrace an Angry Wind*, 267- 9.

[13] Sword, *Embrace an Angry Wind*, 426-7; William P.H. Chambers diary, Feb. 1865, Mississippi Dept. of Archives and History, Jackson, Miss.

[14] Senator Landon Haynes, (Tenn.) to Mr. H. Reynolds, January 12, 1865. Wiley Sword Collection, item #491.

earth in that god-forsaken ditch at Franklin they had confronted extreme adversity with a fierce pride that foretold of American valor in countless ordeals in the years to come.

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