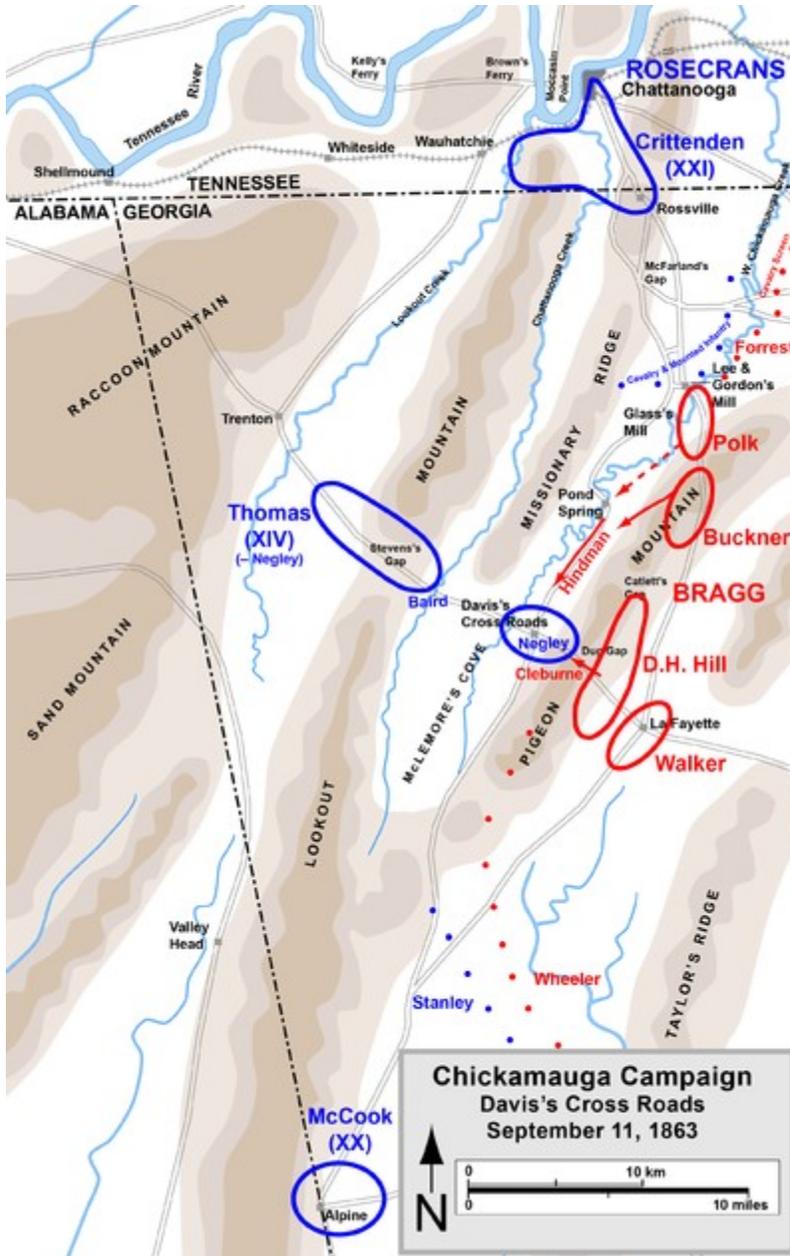


# The Battle of Chickamauga as Told by a Union Officer

By Jeannette Holland Austin



An Account by Smith D. Atkins as presented by Smith D. Atkins at the Opera House in Mendota, Illinois. February 22, 1907 at the invitation of Woman's

## Relief Corps

Battle of ChickamaugaThe was one of the bloodiest battles of the Confederates. As one visits the scene of the battle in Walker County and the presence of tombstones and graves bedecked in the woods, the emotions of loss are prevalent to the senses. "

When the advance of the Army of the Cumberland began it was the desire of General Rosecran, commanding the Army of the Cumberland, to confuse and mislead Bragg, commanding the Confederate Army. Sending a portion of his army, cavalry, infantry and artillery, across the Cumberland mountains into the valley of the Tennessee north of Chattanooga to threaten that city from the north, he led his main army across the Tennessee at Bridgeport, Tennessee, and Caperton's Ferry, Alabama, and crossing the mountains into Lookout Valley, swung his army to the south and west of Chattanooga, rendering the occupation of that city untenable by Bragg with his line of supplies threatened in his rear." Atkins compared the maneuvers with the brilliant and successful as the famous campaign of John Churchill (the Duke of Marlborough) before the battle of Blenheim in 1704.

"I could plainly see the Confederate fort, and adjusting my field glass hoped to see the effect of his shots; but I was enveloped in smoke when he (Rosecran) fired, and could see nothing. But we learned the effect of his scientific firing a few days afterward when we captured a copy of the Daily Chattanooga Rebel, printed on wall paper, Henry Watterson, now the distinguished editor of the Louisville Courier-Journal, publisher, that said the Yankee artillery at Harrison's Landing at the first fire dismounted the brass gun in the Confederate fort and killed four men."

" On September 4th, 1863, my regiment was ordered to join Wilder, north of Chattanooga. " It immediately ascended to the top of Walden's Ridge, which was a continuation of Lookout Mountain on the north side of the Tennessee River. " ... from that elevation I looked for hours with my field

glass into the deserted streets of Chattanooga and became convinced that Bragg had evacuated that Confederate stronghold." The regiment was then ordered to take the advance into Chattanooga. On the morning of the 9th of September the Union troops crossed the nose of the mountain on the Nashville road and found Confederate cavalry holding the road. When Wilder's Brigade battery from Moccasin Point on the north side of the Tennessee began throwing its shells onto the mountain, enfilading the Union's line of skirmishers, they were compelled to fall back.

"The battle of Chickamauga was a useless battle, the broken and shattered Army of the Cumberland driven from the field and cooped up and nearly starved to death in Chattanooga, that (General) Rosecrans was in full possession of on September 9th, 1863."

"My orders from General Rosecrans were to enter the city of Chattanooga, obtain all the information possible concerning the evacuation by Bragg, and to return to him with my regiment. When I was ready to start back the road was filled with Crittenden's corps of the Army of the Cumberland, that followed me into Chattanooga, and when just ready to return I was ordered by General Crittenden to go up the Tennessee River to Fire Island, ten miles, and enable Wilder with his brigade to cross."

But the Confederate cavalry was ahead, until the regiment reached a famous grape plantation eight miles north of Chattanooga where Wilder's Brigade was already crossing the river. They spent the night at Grayville, east of Chattanooga and during the night received orders to join General Rosecrans at La Fayette. " ...and moving before daylight on September 11th I struck the Confederate pickets about two miles north of Ringgold. Sending word back to Wilder I dismounted my regiment, when the enemy mounted and moved out to charge my line, waiting until they were close upon me my repeating Spencer rifles halted their charge and turned it back.

Then they formed in two lines to renew the charge when Wilder came up with a section of 10-pound rifled cannon, and opened immediately.

Instantly the artillery fire was answered, but not a shot came near us; firing again with our artillery, instantly came the response. We did not know it then, but Crittenden's troops were approaching Ringgold from the west and we from the north, and it was Crittenden's guns we heard, while Forrest retreated through Ringgold gap.

Had Crittenden's troops and Wilder's Brigade been acting in concert, General Forrest and his cavalry would have been captured at Ringgold. Sending out a company on the La Fayette road, the enemy was found in strong force at the Chickamauga River, and my regiment marched to Rossville, reaching there after dark. Confident that Rosecrans was in Chattanooga, and not in La Fayette, I sent officers to Chattanooga before daylight on the 12th of September, but they did not return to me, and an hour after daylight I took the road to La Fayette, striking the enemy in strong force at Gordon's Mill on the Chickamauga. I was without corn for my animals, and finding a corn field I fed my horses and filled the nose-bags with corn."

On the morning of September 19, 1863, the Army of the Cumberland began its race for Chattanooga flanked by the army of General Bragg. The race continued all day long. Aiken's regiment was ordered by General Rosecrans to take its position in a field southeast of Widow Glenn's house. During that time they skirmished with the Confederate line and captured a prisoner west of the LaFayette road. "

The prisoner was brought immediately to me. He was a Virginia boy, badly frightened at first, but he soon told me that he belonged to Longstreet's corps from the Virginia Army, and detailed to me how he came by cars, where they disembarked, and how they marched to the battlefield. I took the prisoner, the first one captured from Longstreet's corps, to General Rosecrans at his then headquarters at Widow Glenn's house, and told him that I had a prisoner from Longstreet's corps, when Rosecrans flew into a passion, denounced the little boy as a liar, declared that Longstreet's corps

was not there. The little boy prisoner was so frightened that he would not speak a word. In sorrow I turned away, and joined my regiment. Rosecrans found out that Longstreet's corps was there."

Afterwards Aiken's regiment was on the LaFayette road when compelled to withdraw as the Confederates swarmed forcefully across his right flank. They came upon thousands of Union troops in disorder running off through the woods toward Chattanooga.

"Daylight came; with it white flags in our front where the Confederates were burying their dead. An hour after daylight I discovered a heavy column of the enemy, in column of companies doubled on the center, slowly and silently creeping past my left flank toward the left flank of McCook's corps. I repeatedly sent him information of the approach of that heavy column of the enemy, but he testily declared that there was no truth in it, and refused to send a skirmish line of his own, that he might easily have done, and found out for himself. When Longstreet's corps sprang with a yell upon the left flank of McCook's corps, the line in my front advanced, and I retired to join Wilder as ordered.

McCook's corps was wiped off the field without any attempt at real resistance, and floated off from the battlefield like flecks of foam upon a river. His artillerymen cut the traces, and leaving the guns, rode away toward Chattanooga. The rout of McCook's corps was complete. "