

=Presented the first successful inauguration of the election device frequently employed in later years which had for its motto, "Claim everything in sight and leave it to the other party to prove the truth."

Well, Gracie was right, there was no time during the Civil War when that axiom better applied than in the Union Army of the Cumberland after the Battle of Chickamauga.

In the wake of that disastrous defeat, everyone from Commanding General William Stark Rosecrans down to his 200 or so regimental commanders tried to snatch whatever crumb they could, whatever crumb of glory they could from a very, very meager plate. The smallest achievement of the battle became exaggerated into an epic success and few generals were willing to offer compliments to other units for fear of diminishing their own role in the battle.

Well, Colonel Moses Walker was an exception. Colonel Walker's normal place of duty was in command of a brigade in the Army but he had been placed under arrest and temporarily relieved of command just before the battle for some minor breach of discipline. During the battle he ended up serving as a kind of high ranking aide to camp to his division commander John Brannon. After the battle, Walker said in his report, " The 21st Ohio saved the day at Chickamauga."

Now granted, Colonel Walker was from here in Findlay, so, of course, he was well acquainted with the officers and men of the 21st and somewhat prejudice toward them. Nonetheless, there were other regiments equally familiar to him at the battle including those of his own brigade; yet, he singled out the 21st Ohio for special praise.

Now when I started work on my book on Chickamauga, the 21st Ohio was really just another regiment to me; I had no special interest in it nor any particular feeling about its role in the battle. Well, I completed my manuscript about two months ago, all 1100 pages of it, and I can now say that I feel exactly as Colonel Walker did. I firmly believe that no other regiment, North or South, fought more gallantly nor made a greater contribution at Chickamauga than did the 21st Ohio. It not only saved nearly half the Union Army on the second day of the battle but it made possible the famous stand on Horseshoe Ridge and Snodgrass Hill that earned General George Thomas the famous nickname of Rock of Chickamauga.

The 21st Ohio was a very unlikely candidate for the role it played in Chickamauga. As I am sure most of you are well aware, the 21st was recruited mostly from the rural areas of this county of Hancock as well as Putnam, Wood, Defiance and Ottawa counties. Most of the enlisted men were farmers or sons of farmers. As Captain Silas Canfield, the regimental historian wrote and I quote, "This implies

that most of the men of the regiment were peaceful, quiet, intelligent, industrious and self-reliant and were not contaminated by the follies and vices of city life". It gets even better than this. Canfield goes on to say, "Brought up to labor they were strong hearty men. Well prepared for the arduous and fatiguing duties of the soldier. Industry had taught them perseverance and they had learned to turn aside for no obstacle and they never stopped short of the accomplishment of their purposes." Well, this may all be true enough but in the months before Chickamauga, I'm not quite sure the men knew what their purpose was. They fought as well as any other regiment in the Army but they frankly were lousy soldiers in every other respect. They were one of the worst regiments in the Army of Cumberland.

Here we see some of the enlisted men and one of the officers of the 21st. But during the six months between the Battle of Stone River, which is covered in my first book, and the resumption of active campaigning, the 21st was constantly in hot water with Army headquarters. A couple of examples will suffice to make a point.

By January 22, 1863, just three weeks after the battle of Stone River, General Rosecrans himself sent the following note of reprimand to Colonel James Niebling, the regimental commander, and I quote, "Colonel, the inspector of your brigade has reported upon the condition of your company and regimental books and papers as being miserable".

A similar report was made regarding the sanitary conditions and the discipline of the 21st Ohio. I'll quote from just one because they all sound pretty much the same. From the Brigade Commander to Colonel Niebling, I quote, "Your attention is called to the irregularities in your command with respect to camp guard. The sentinels at your camp have been found loafing around campfires or resting upon their arms, chatting with passers by, sometime even sitting down and writing letters. Officers who approach your lines are seldom treated with the courtesy due to rank and a very few of your sentinels care to perform guard duty properly". He added by the way that, "That violations of orders with regard to kitchen sinks and cast off clothing and offal, have also been noticed". It must have been a very disgusting camp they occupied. Well, the problem was Colonel Niebling. Niebling was an easy going man who made no real effort to enforce discipline. He was a hard fighter who took it easy on his men. Consequently, not surprisingly, he was very popular with the men of the 21st. Now Niebling's way of dealing with the regiment's problems did not help the situation either. Every time the brass at headquarters turned up the heat

he went home on leave.

Now that left Lt. Col. Willis Stouten, who was just 28 yrs old in charge to make things right. I should add by the way that both Stouten and Niebling were from here in Hancock County. Stouten by contrast was a rigid disciplinarian who tried to turn things around in Niebling's absence and, not surprisingly, the men despised him.

The 21st though had one very, very important thing going for them and that was the Colt revolving rifle. In April a small consignment of Colt rifles was received on an experimental basis by the Army of the Cumberland's Ordnance Officer to be given to an Infantry Regiment that was to be converted to mounted infantry or calvary. Now the 21st Ohio was selected to receive the rifles. It never got its horses but seven of the ten companies of the regiment did get the Colt rifles. The other three companies were armed with infield rifles. I don't know if you can read this. I'll run through this with you - the characteristics of the Colt rifle. It's very important to get a feeling for this because of the importance the Colt rifle plays later on in my talk.

Now to load the Colt rifle the soldier first half cocked the hammer here to allow the cylinder to rotate freely. He then pushed the paper or parchment cartridge which had the bullet attached at the end, you see, into one of the cylinder's five chambers. Next he turned the cylinder so that the loaded chamber was in the bottom position and then he pulled the lever activating the ram rod right here which would click in and firmly seize the bullet. He repeated this process four times more and then he placed percussion caps on the nipples fired between the chambers.

Now once he had loaded the weapon - a good rifleman could fire all five rounds as quickly as he could cock that hammer and pull the trigger - or about 9 seconds in all to fire the weapon which was an incredible advance for that time. With the average muzzle loading rifle you could fire at best three rounds a minute, so you can see the advantage of the Colt rifle.

So in brief this is how the 21st Ohio entered the Chickamauga campaign with a terrible reputation in the Army and oddly enough with one of the most lethal weapons in the entire Federal inventory. It also went into action with Lt. Col. Stouten in command. Col. Niebling, it seems, had been sent back to Ohio on recruiting duty just before the campaign opened - it may have been intentional, I don't know. The 21st Ohio was assigned to the brigade of Col. William Surwell in Gen. James Nagley's division of

George Thomas's 14th forum. On September 18th, the day before the battle, the regiment numbered 554 men which made it the second largest regiment in the entire Army. The numbers break down as follows: 1 Lt. Col Stouten, 1 Major, 1 Surgeon, 1 Assistant Surgeon, 1 hospital steward, 12 enlisted men to serve under the Assistant Surgeon, 7 Captains, 13 Lieutenants and 517 enlisted men. 342 of these men were armed with the Colt rifle and the remaining 175 had infield muskets.

For the 21st Ohio the Battle of Chickamauga really began at 11:15 a.m. on September 20, 1863. The regiment had seen no fighting to speak of during the battle. It had spent the day guarding the southern flank of the Army and did not reach the fighting until about sunset - just in time to fire a few scattered volleys into an enemy that was rapidly falling back into the dark smoke filled forest.

Let's take a look at the map tactical situation on the morning of the 20th and briefly orient ourselves to the important terrain features. This is the first map that you have in your packet there. To orient ourselves to the terrain, the prize of the Chickamauga campaign was the city of Chattanooga which lay about 10 miles to the northwest or off the upper left hand corner of the map. The two most important roads for our purposes were the McFayette Road, which ran north to south right to the battlefield, cut right down the trace of the Union lines and the McFarland Gap road, which started here and ran back to a pass in Missionary Ridge, and led back to Chattanooga as well. These were the two primary routes of retreat that the Federal Army could take should they have to fall back to Chattanooga. And Chattanooga was again the prize of the campaign because in essence it was the gateway to the South. Many important railroads started there that led deep into the South. It was a natural route of invasion into the South. The most significant terrain feature on the battlefield, the most significant high ground, was Horseshoe Ridge which you see is roughly a horseshoe shape right here - we'll discuss that in much greater detail a little later on. The Armies were deployed as you see here. The strategy of the Union Commander General Rosecrans, in a nutshell without going into much detail, was to hold his ground roughly on the trace of McFayette Road and protect his left. The importance of protecting his left is evident because that controlled McFayette Road and the McFarland's Gap Road, okay, protect his line of retreat to Chattanooga.

The battle plan on the second day of the Confederate commander Braxton Bragg was, in a nutshell, to attack the entire Union line

starting with attacks on Union left and work his way down to the line of battle. His objective was to envelope the Union left and force it back on itself and thereby cut the North off, cut the Northern Army off, from its route of retreat to Chattanooga, interpose his own army between the Federals and Chattanooga. The 21st Ohio is located in the Snodgrass cornfield with its brigade under Surwell right about here and as you can see that is the only brigade that is not on the map, which shows how the 21st Ohio is slighted even today. This shows the fighting between 11:15 and 12:15 on the morning of the 20th. Bragg began his attacks on the Union left, they were ^{repelled} recalled, he gradually worked his way down attacking closer to the center then toward the right but unfortunately for the North at about 11:15 one Union division left the line through a misunderstanding in orders leaving a 500 yard gap just as the Confederates 12,000 man Confederate Corps launched its attack. They pushed right through the gap completely decimated the divisions to the South, driving them from the battlefield. They caused the division of John Brannon to gradually come apart, gradually fragment. As fragmented, Brannon's division, about 2,500 men in the division, found their way back, crossed over the field in the direction of Horseshoe Ridge, which as I mentioned was exactly where the 21st Ohio with its brigade, with Surwell's brigade, was laying. They were positioned there earlier in the morning to guard the artillery of Thomas which he amassed there on Horseshoe Ridge. As Brannon's division fell back toward Horseshoe Ridge the Confederates veered to the North and pursued them toward Horseshoe Ridge as well.

At 12:15 you have Brannon's division falling back in retreat toward Horseshoe Ridge across these fields and the Confederates right behind them.

Before we pick up the action with the 21st, let's quickly take a look at the terrain over which they were about to fight. The regiment, as I said lay with their brigade in the cornfield of George Washington Snodgrass, right here, this cornfield at the edge of Horseshoe Ridge. The Snodgrass farm house was a log cabin built on the northern slope of a lightly wooded knoll known as Snodgrass Hill. Snodgrass Hill right there and constituted the eastern tip of Horseshoe Ridge, right about there. From Snodgrass Hill west to the Dry Valley Road were a series of hills and draws which are collectively known today as Horseshoe Ridge. Now, nearer the Snodgrass Farm, Horseshoe Ridge is defined by three distinct hills. Hill One, which I call in my book, Whiskey Hill One, Hill Two, Hill Three, this is Dry Valley Road. You have Snodgrass cornfield, Snodgrass house, Hill One, Two, Three. The first of these hills,

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Hill One began at the doorstep of the Snodgrass house and crested about three hundred feet south of there. The second, Hill Two, which you see here, was just slightly higher and crested at a point about 400 feet west of Hill One. Hill Three, in turn, began about 300 feet west of Hill Two and had a less clearly defined crest. All three of these hills were heavily timbered and covered with a light underbrush on their southern slopes, which is the slope that faced the oncoming Confederates. The visibility along the ridge varied from a few feet to nearly 100 yards depending on the density of the undergrowth. A relatively wide and shallow ravine ran north from the Vitadel Road and divided Hill One and Two. The ravine came up from the south and cut right here, you can see here. Hill One and Two distinctly defined by that. And again, this will all be more important as we progress. A narrow plateau with extremely steep slopes ran for about 400 yards west of Hill Three. So you've got from East to West the Snodgrass house and Hill One, Two, Three and a long plateau running west of Hill Three. A dirt lane called the Vitadel Road ran all along the southern base of Horseshoe Ridge along the bottom of those three hills. Now if you look at your tactical map, first map, you can see clearly how important Horseshoe Ridge was and it protected both McFarland's Gap Road and the rear of Thomas' line on the left, which was the only part of the Army really still fighting in the organized force of the battlefield. So it was absolutely paramount to survival that those forces still fighting that Horseshoe Ridge still beheld.

At 12:15 p.m. General Brann^on reached Hill Number One, down where you see those markers, he had been swept out of the fields to the south with the survivors of his division. Now, while his regimental officers tried to halt the panic and rally their commands down there in Hill Number One, Brann^on galloped over to the Snodgrass cornfield where he found General Negley with Surwell's brigade and the artillery they had been ordered there to protect. Well, Negley and Brann^on conferred briefly and what passed between them was clouded by the kind of post battle incrimination that I mentioned earlier in my talk. Apparently, Brann^on asked Negley to send one regiment over here to Hill Number Two to protect his right flank. He was forming a line right here along Hill One facing South. He wanted somebody here to protect his right flank. Now, Negley responded by placing at his disposal the 21st Ohio which was the largest regiment he had in Surwell's brigade. Brann^on rode back out to Hill Number One assuming Negley would be there to see to disposition of the 21st Ohio on Hill Number Two basically left things to Negley. Unfortunately, Negley had lost his stomach for the fight. For the past week or so he had been suffering from a very bad case of acute diarrhea. He had not

slept the night before and had not eaten anything since the day before. He was completely exhausted.

When he saw the Confederates approaching the southern edge of the Snodgrass field about 400 yards away he decided to move his batteries, his artillery batteries further west out on to Horseshoe Ridge and away from the approaching Confederates to a more safe location. He took Surwell's brigade minus the 21st Ohio with him out on to the Ridge. Now unfortunately once Negley started moving he didn't stop. He saw the demoralized state of Brannan's men as they mingled about Hill One and the frightened troops of other commands who were swarming all around up and down the hills here and he kept on going west through the trees to the northwest right out of the battlefield and on to Chattanooga. That was the last we see of Negley for the day. Also he lost his command after that.

Now, where does this leave the 21st Ohio at 12:15. Well, for the moment they were completely abandoned, neither Negley nor Brannan had bothered to tell Col. Stouten where to take his regiment. So, Stouten was at a loss as to what to do. He decided to try to get some answers for himself. He left the regiment in a peach orchard next to the Snodgrass house - which is about 300 yards behind these trees here at the most - and he rode out onto Hill One to try to find some answers for himself.

Well, in the middle of Hill One, he ran into Col. Walker. Stouten was happy to see a familiar face from Findlay amid all the bedlam and panic. So happy that he told Walker that he, "Wish to join his regiment in any movement that Walker's brigade intended to make on the hills". Well, of course, Stouten was being charitable. As we recall, Walker had been placed under arrest and had no brigade to command. Technically as well he was prohibited from giving orders to anyone but with everything so chaotic and things looking so desperate he decided to act nonetheless. He waved his hand in the direction of Hill Two and told Stouten to take his regiment off to the Hill to defend the right. Stouten returned to the orchard and he led the 21st out onto Horseshoe Ridge.

Bullets were just starting to zip across the hilltop from beyond the trees there at the south. Confederate skirmishers belonging to Kirshaw's South Carolina brigade were just then feeling their way across the Vitadel Road to the south. Stouten was still not quite sure where Walker wanted him to place the regiment so he ended up counter marching his men back and forth across the two hills. At one point he actually stopped them with their backs toward the fire. The men understandably began to panic.

Captain Canfield, who was the senior company commander, lost his temper. He yelled at Stouten. Colonel, "if we maneuver these men much longer under fire we will lose control of them. Give us a position to hold and will hold it. Give us any enemy to charge and we will charge them but men will not stand fire from the rear". Stouten took the point. He faced the regiment about and brought it into the line of battle across Hill Number Three. Unfortunately, he was one hill too far over. The left of the regiment touched the top of the draw between Hill Number Two and Hill Number Three.

The time was about 12:40 p.m. Now this is what the men saw as they settled into position on Hill Three and looked out ahead of them down the southern slope of the hill. Visibility was next to nothing as you see here. Vines and undergrowth. Here's the view along their line of battle, along the line from right to left. This is looking from the top of Hill Three back to the ravine between Hill Two and Three. So you are looking generally north-east. That, by the way, is the monument to the 21st Ohio on the battlefield of Chickamauga. The men here on Hill Three broke ranks and began to get their logs and rocks, whatever they could find to throw together a hasty breastworks along their front. The breastworks were probably about two feet high at best - not much more than that - the men then lay down behind them to wait the enemy's attack.

Each man who had a Colt rifle had in his cartridge box or stuffed in his pockets a total of about 95 rounds of ammunition. Now this was far more than the basic load - basic combat load - of 60 rounds per man. The 21st fortunately had a very enterprising 23 year old Ordinance Sergeant named John Bolten who came from C Company. That morning Bolten had done his inspection of the troops and found that each man had 70 rounds which was already very good but Bolten was not content with that. He rode over to the division ordinance train and pretty much helped himself to a few boxes of ammunition that were compatible with the 56 caliber Colt cylinders. He managed to steal and scrounge enough to give each man another 25 rounds. Well as we shall see, Bolten's initiative was to prove more important than many generals that day. And, I think, he was fairly one of the low ranking but unsung heroes of Chickamauga.

At 1 p.m. the 21st met the first attack against its position. It was delivered by the 2nd South Carolina regiment and the 2nd South Carolina battalions of Kirshaw's brigade. South Carolinians charged recklessly up the slopes, they expected no serious

resistance. They had been pushing the survivors of Brannon's men for 500 yards pell mell. They expected to meet no organized resistance. Just before they reached the crest of Hill Three the 21st Ohio opened fire and a sheet of flames swept across the hilltop. The stunned South Carolinians ran pell mell back down the slopes all the way to the Vitadel Road. There, as John Cox, a Sergeant in the 2nd South Carolina recalled, "Protected from the terrific fire from the top of the hill we lay down and for awhile enjoyed a nice breeze passing through the woods. Now and then, blowing from the trees bunches of yellow leaves which gently sailed down and settled on the ground among us. And I recollect in my mind, I compared these falling leaves to the falling men on that battlefield." The enemy attack had disintegrated so fast that the officers of the 21st thought they had brushed aside nothing more than a reinforced line of a few skirmishers. On that of assumption, Col. Stouten ordered his men to their feet, over the breastworks and down the slope in pursuit - it was a very, very bad idea. At the base of the hill, the Ohioans were as vulnerable as the South Carolinians had been a few minutes earlier. Sgt. Cox said, "We had sufficient notice of their coming to be ready for them. Our officers commanded us to hold our fire till they got in short range and then give it to them. They were allowed to get within 20 yards of our position in the thick undergrowth along the road, then before they visualized our presence, we rose up as one man and poured into them such a volley as to make many of them bite the dust for the last time". The 21st went back up the hill and did not leave their breastworks again that afternoon.

Fifteen minutes after the 21st fell back Kirshaw sent his brigade forward a second time, the results were exactly the same.

After the second attack, a hush fell over the battlefield. Only the moans of the wounded and the occasional crack of a sharp shooter's rifle broke the silence.

Sharp shooting was the Civil War equivalent of sniper fire and it was also a distinctly a Southern specialty. In some brigades there were designated battalions of sharp shooters, in others the best shots were selected to climb trees or creep close to the enemy to pick off their mounted officers. An insidious way to fight.

Well, Col. Stouten was slow to appreciate this threat. While his men hugged the ground, he sat placidly on his horse. Stouten was wearing a bright cloak and it made him an irresistible target for every sharp shooter on that part of the field. Captain Canfield was standing next to him. Several bullets whizzed past. Stouten

glanced toward a tree from which the last shot came. He seemed genuinely surprised, "That damn cuss is firing at me, Captain Canfield." Canfield suggested to Stouten that Stouten might want to move about to make a less inviting target but the Colonel refused, "I guess they won't hurt anybody," he said. The next bullet killed his horse. Stouten picked himself up off the ground and looked through his field glass to try to find the sharp shooter. Another shot rang out from the tree, it ripped through Stouten's right arm and came out beneath his shoulder. "I think this will use me up," he moaned, and then sank to the ground. Canfield cradled the Colonel in his arms. Stouten knew exactly what had happened. "These joint wounds are dangerous," he told Canfield. He cautioned the Captain not to say a word of his wounding to the men before he was carried off to a field hospital. He ask Canfield to help Major Arnold McMann with the regiment. "I want you to see that the men do their duty for they have a hard fight before them". Well, Stouten was right about the wound being dangerous, he died two months later.

Major McMann now assumed command. McMann was a native of Ireland who had immigrated with his parents to Perrysburg. McMann had been promoted to Major for gallantry at the Battle of Stone's River.

McMann inherited a serious problem when he took command. The Colt rifles had begun to overheat and foul during Kirshaw's second attack. So, quickly, the men fired them and emptied the cylinders. Each discharge also sent a flash of fire into the dry leaves and undergrowth in front of their position. Brush fires sprang up all along the path taken by the 21st when it charged down the hill. Seventeen year old Wilson Vance, a Second Lieutenant in Company D, grandson of the founder of Findlay, described the scene as it appeared from the hilltop. "Scattered over the burning and smoking hillside lay a number of wounded men belonging to the regiment who had fallen in our swift advance and stubborn retreat to our old position. And soon their cries for relief became fairly appalling as the agony of being roasted alive was added to the pain of their wounds. Volunteers rushed forward and drew the poor fellows back but some of them were piteously burned. The white cooked flesh peeling back from their charred finger bones and in the case of an old schoolmate of mine great flakes falling off his cheeks and so they died".

The Union line along Horseshoe Ridge was about to face the supreme crisis of the afternoon. Since the last attack by Kirshaw, three Confederate brigades had come up on the left of Kirshaw to his assistance; Anderson's Mississippi brigade, which we see here in

this slide, formed along the Vitadel Road to the left of Kirshaw. They formed exactly opposite the 21st Ohio opposite Hill Three. The Tennessee brigades of John Fulton and Cyrus Sugg, which are not pictured here, formed near Anderson's left. They stood opposite the long ridge or plateau, that I mentioned, that ran past Hill Three. You have Sugg here, Fulton here, here's this long ridge that ran west of Hill Three, as you can see, completely undefended. The right flank company of the 21st Ohio right here lay opposite the right flank regiment of Sugg's brigade. Otherwise, there was not a single Union soldier standing between the Tennesseans and Federal rear. Should any of these Rebels succeed in gaining this plateau and penetrating the Union rear, Thomas's entire position along Horseshoe Ridge would be rendered completely untenable.

Confederates attacked at 2 p.m. Anderson's brigade was a few hundred yards closer to the Ridge and so struck the Union line about 15 minutes before Sugg and Fulton. Anderson attacked Hill Three down by the 21st with two regiments, the 10th and 44th Mississippi, and he covered their advance with a short artillery barrage. Well, the artillery barrage really didn't cause any damage to the 21st due to them being covered by the breastworks but the exploding shells ignited even more brush fires and in a few minutes the entire woods in front of the 21st Ohio was blanketed in smoke. Out of the smoke came the Mississippians just a few yards from the crest. The 21st opened fire and the Rebel line shivered. Still the Rebel line pressed on. They came within 30 feet of the 21st Ohio breastworks before the overwhelming fire power of the Colt rifles forced them to yield.

One frightened Mississippian dropped his rifle and darted into the ranks of Company C to surrender. As he regained his composure, the Rebel looked about him. He was astonished to see only a single line of Yankees, "Where are your men he asked." "Here they are." his Captain replied, waving his hand along the rapidly thinning line of Ohioans. "My God", said the Rebel, "I thought you had a whole division up here."

Anderson was at the bottom of the hill to greet his men as they stumbled back down the hill in retreat after just ten minutes in action against the 21st.

He immediately sent forward his reserve regiments, again the Colt rifles halted the enemy. This time however, the Mississippians held their ground and returned their fire from just a few yards away from the 21st. After each volley they inched a little bit nearer to the crest.